

UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

“Cute Is a Word That Only Women Use”

Linguistic Stereotyping in the Contemporary
Hollywood Blockbuster

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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract <p>Sosiolingvistikissa pro-gradu -tutkielmassani tarkastellaan englannin kielen perinteisiä sukupuolittuneiksi koettuja kielenpiirteitä, niihin yhdistettyjä sukupuolistereotyyppioita ja niiden esiintymistä viime vuosien Hollywood -menestyselokuviissa. Tutkielmani selvittää, tunnistetaanko nämä perinteiset, vuosikymmeniä vallinneet uskomukset sukupuolittuneista kielenpiirteistä edelleen ja tutkii sitä, mihin sukupuoleen nämä kielen piirteet yhdistetään. Lisäksi tutkielma tarkastelee näiden kielellisten sukupuolistereotyyppien leviämistä Suomeen ja tämän leviämisen mahdollista yhteyttä Hollywood -menestyselokuvassa esiintyvään dialogiin. Tutkielman tulokset pohjautuvat verkossa toteutettuun kyselytutkimukseen.</p> <p>Tutkielmani teoriasta perustuu ensisijaisesti kielitieteilijä Robin Lakoffin teoksessaan <i>Language and a Woman's Place</i> (1975) esittämiin väittämiin spesifeistä kielipiirteistä, jotka voidaan katsoa perinteisiksi englannin kielen kielellisiksi sukupuolistereotyyppioiksi. Tutkielma pyrkii valottamaan massakulttuurissa käytetyn englannin kielen vaikutusta sukupuolittuneiden kielistereotyyppien muodostumiseen ja vahvistumiseen. Analyysin kohteeksi ovat valikoituneet Hollywood-menestyselokuvat elokuva-alalla vallitsevan sukupuoliepätasa-arvon sekä Hollywoodin mittavan vaikutusvallan vuoksi. Lisäksi Hollywood-elokuvien dialogia ei ole aiemmissa tutkimuksissa tarkasteltu näiden stereotyyppisten perinteisten kielipiirteiden näkökulmasta.</p> <p>Kyselytutkimuksessa pyydettiin osallistujia arvioimaan kymmentä vuorosanasitaattia, jotka oli valikoitu vuosina 2017–2018 tuotetuista Hollywood –menestyselokuvista ja jotka sisälsivät Lakoffin nimeämiä, sukupuolittuneiksi koettuja kielenpiirteitä. Kyselyn avulla tutkittiin, mitkä kielelliset piirteet vaikuttavat mielipiteen muodostumiseen puhujan sukupuolesta, kun vuorosanasitaattien puhujaa eikä kontekstia tiedetä. Osallistujien tuli valita mihin sukupuoleen he yhdistävät kunkin vuorosanasitaatin kolmesta vaihtoehdosta: nainen, mies ja en osaa sanoa. Lisäksi osallistujilla oli mahdollisuus vastata vapaaehtoiseen avoimeen kysymykseen, jossa pyydettiin kommentoimaan annettua vastausta. Kyselyyn oli mahdollista osallistua, mikäli henkilö puhui äidinkielenään joko Amerikan englantia tai suomea. Kyselyyn osallistui 100 henkilöä ja sen tulosten analyysi toteutettiin vertaamalla saatuja vastauksia vastaajien iän, sukupuoli-identiteetin ja äidinkielen perusteella.</p> <p>Tutkielman päälöydöksiä olivat se, että perinteisesti sukupuolittuneiksi koetut kielen piirteet tunnistettiin pääosin hyvin, sekä se, että osallistujien vastaukset eivät muutamaa poikkeusta lukuun ottamatta eronneet merkittävästi toisistaan. Ensin mainittu löydös osoittaa, että osallistajat tunnistavat kielen piirteet ja yhdistävät ne siihen sukupuoleen, johon stereotypiat on perinteisesti liitetty. Jälkimmäinen löydös puolestaan merkitsee sitä, että englannin kielen sukupuolistereotyyppien tunnistaminen ei katso ikää, sukupuoli-identiteettiä eikä äidinkieltä. Lisäksi kyselyn laadullisesta aineistosta nousi esille kiinnostava sivulöydös: vuorosanasitaattien semanttinen sisältö sekä kyselytutkimukseen vastanneiden sitaateille luomat kuvitteelliset kontekstit vaikuttivat suuresti siihen, mihin sukupuoleen vuorosanasitaatit yhdistettiin. Löydös on merkityksellinen, sillä se viittaa siihen, että kielelliset sukupuolistereotypiat pohjautuvat mahdollisesti enemmän kielen semanttisiin ja pragmaattisiin ominaisuuksiin kuin näihin vuosikymmeniä tutkittuihin, perinteisesti sukupuolittuneina pidettyihin kielen piirteisiin.</p>		
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1. Introduction

Once I started studying sociolinguistics I became fascinated by how language can influence the perceptions that we have of a speaker without even seeing them, or, moreover, without even *hearing* them. Just by reading a phrase we can make assumptions of its utterer based on the beliefs or attitudes we have towards their language use. This phenomenon is referred to as *language regard*. As described by Preston (2018), the concept of language regard refers to those opinions, beliefs and perceptions of language that are essentially nonlinguistic:

At a most basic level, *language regard* refers to both the individual beliefs about and affective responses to language details at any level and from any source. It also refers to the *organized* structure of such beliefs and responses from cognitive, sociolinguistic, and anthropological points of view. (p.3)

Thus, language regard encompasses those learned language perceptions that a person has, for example, of a certain regional speech without necessarily being able to pinpoint exactly what it is in that variation that makes them perceive the language the way they do. As my academic interest has always lied in language in relation to gender, I have especially been interested in the ways people are believed or expected to speak just based on their gender, i.e. the gender stereotypes of language.

When I first read Robin Lakoff's 1975 book *Language and a Woman's Place*, which deals with the fundamental gender stereotypes of the English language, I realized that even as a non-native speaker I, too, recognized these rather old stereotypes. I, like many others, grew up consuming American entertainment mediums, such as Hollywood films. As a minor student in film studies, I understood that films have had and still do have a solid status in the global mass culture and their influence on the everyday moviegoer is tremendous. I started to wonder whether I had unconsciously developed beliefs and accepted the stereotypes of how women and men speak English via the films I had watched.

In 2017, a mere 11% of the top 250 grossing films were written by a non-male screenwriter and similarly 11% had a non-male director (Perrone, 2018). This shows that these films offer a narrow perspective to the representation of gender, and furthermore, a narrow perspective to the language that is used by the male and female characters in them. This gender inequality of the film industry has been addressed from inside Hollywood, too. The #MeToo movement popularized by actor Alyssa Milano in 2017, and the Time's Up campaign that followed in

early 2018, founded by more than 300 women in the entertainment industry, have demanded change and managed to successfully draw global attention to the issue of gender inequality and sexual harassment, not only in the American film industry but also in other societal institutions globally.

Due to the unfortunate truth that the film industry is a male dominated endeavor of many decades, and as Hollywood has a big impact on what is being seen and heard by millions globally, I wanted to study linguistic stereotyping in the contemporary Hollywood blockbuster. In addition to the current theme of this topic and to the wide influence that Hollywood has, I felt that it was important to study a medium that is meant for everyone but that is predominantly made by men.

I wanted to scan Hollywood films that have had massive global commercial success for traditional gendered linguistic stereotypes. I aspired to see whether people would recognize these stereotypes by simply reading an anonymous, out-of-context film dialogue quotes, and moreover, I wanted to see which genders they associate with these quotes. Thus, in this sense, this research is a study of language regard, studying whether traditional language stereotypes exist in people's minds and whether they are able to state why they associate the quotes they are asked to evaluate to a male or a female speaker. This research's purpose is also to examine if and how greatly those gendered linguistic stereotypes of the English language can spread via Hollywood blockbusters to countries where people do not have English as their native language, in this case to Finland.

Thus, the research questions are as follows:

- 1) Which dialogue samples from contemporary Hollywood blockbusters containing stereotypical gendered language are associated with female speakers and which with male speakers?
- 2) Are there any particular linguistic stereotypes that are more associated to a specific gender?
- 3) Are there any differences between how these linguistic stereotypes are perceived when looking at the age group and gender of the participants?
- 4) Do these linguistic stereotypes persist with people who don't speak English as a native language, for example, with people who have Finnish as their native language?

This was achieved by conducting a questionnaire, in which 100 participants, who either spoke (American) English or Finnish as their native language, were asked to assess the genders of ten quotes' utterers. These quotes were taken from six globally successful Hollywood blockbusters produced in 2017-2018. The questionnaire's results were analyzed based on the demographic background information of the participants: age, gender identity and native language. Additionally, the participants had the opportunity to answer the optional, open-ended question "why do you think that?" after each quote, which provided qualitative data to complement the quantitative data from the main questions of the questionnaire.

The principal purpose of this study is to examine whether traditional gendered language stereotypes still exist and how they are perceived. Furthermore, the study's purpose is to study the ways language influences people's perceptions of gender in the context of Hollywood films. The study's significance lies in its aim to discover something that has not yet been discovered in the sphere of language, gender and film. If contemporary film dialogue uses and enforces the traditional gendered linguistic stereotypes it is important that this is recognized, and furthermore, it is relevant to re-examine what aspects of language can in fact influence the possible perceptions of a speaker's gender. It is also significant to study whether these perceptions and beliefs can spread via blockbusters, even when one does not speak English as their native language.

The next chapter lays the background for the rest of the paper by first discussing the status of Hollywood and the focus of this study, Hollywood's blockbuster films. Chapter 2 also provides the theoretical approach to this study and looks at the main developments of language and gender in the field of sociolinguistics, as well as presents the linguistic features considered as gender stereotypes of the English language.

Subsequently, in Chapter 3, I explain the methods that were used in this study, present the study's material as well as the procedures of collecting the data. In this chapter I also introduce the questionnaire and the hypotheses of this study. Then, in Chapter 4, I present the results that are then discussed in the following Chapter 5, where I also look at the study's weaknesses and possibilities for further research. Finally, I make my concluding remarks in Chapter 6.

2. Background

In this chapter, I give an overview of the history of Hollywood, explain how the modern blockbuster was created and look at its motivations as the most essential product of Hollywood. I discuss the status of Hollywood as a central part of mass culture, and moreover, I aim to show how film as a visual medium can impact its audience. Secondly, I discuss the contemporary views of gender and look at the background of language and gender in the field of sociolinguistics. I also summarize the main developments of the field and present and discuss selected studies of gendered language. Lastly, I present the theoretical approach of the study.

2.1 Defining Hollywood, Blockbuster and Mass Culture

Hollywood, California, is not just the geographical location where the clear majority of American films are made. When talking about a “Hollywood” film, the term becomes an abstract concept that refers to the set production regime and aesthetics familiar and easily understandable to audiences around the world (Potter, 2001, p. 220, Belton, 2005 p. xxvi). Thus, films that are made in the United States, when it is not an independent production that is, are generally referred to as Hollywood films. Likewise, *Hollywood* is often used as the umbrella term for the whole American film industry (e.g. Spears, et al., 2012).

Per Julian Stringer (2003), the definition of “a blockbuster film” differs depending on who is defining it. The definitions by scholars, journalists and such mark blockbuster as “the most popular form of commercial cinema” that has “insidious superficiality and underlying awfulness” (ibid., p.1), indicating that their commercially centered motives make blockbusters something that has nothing to do with the art of cinema but a lot to do with pleasing the masses. This in many ways is an applicable definition, as blockbusters are the most important merchandise of Hollywood, and they are explicitly aimed for mass consumption (Behlil, 2016, p. 35). Moreover, the most essential quality of a blockbuster is its volume: large-scale budget, numerous cinema screens on the opening weekend, vast national and global marketing, a great amount of publicity, and finally, the sky-high profits (Stringer, 2003; Behlil, 2016, p. 67).

Mass culture then “refers to popular culture, which is produced by the industrial techniques of mass production, and marketed for profit to a mass public of consumers” (Strinati, 2004, p. 10). The concept as we understand it today started to emerge in the 1920s and 1930s (ibid.).

Strinati (ibid.) names the birth of the cinema as one of the turning points in the development of modern mass culture (p. 3-4), and still today, films remain as one of the key components of mass culture. Hollywood as a mass culture phenomenon will be returned to in section 2.3.

2.1.1. The Birth of Hollywood and the Influence of the Contemporary Blockbuster

The first American film companies were founded on the East Coast, but challenging weather conditions and monotonous landscapes eventually led the companies to film on location in California, and by the early 1910s, Los Angeles had become the new home of American film (Thompson & Brodwell, 2003, p. 42). Hollywood was first a small neighborhood with scaled-down open-air studios, but it quickly grew into the symbol of cinema when more and more production complexes emerged (ibid.).

The Hollywood studio system started to develop when the independent film production and distribution companies merged into bigger ones (Thompson & Brodwell, 2003). Among these were the future giants, still among the biggest of Hollywood: Universal, Paramount, 20th Century Fox and Warner Bros. (ibid., p. 68). The major companies were vertically integrated, which meant that they produced, distributed and screened the films themselves and owned a remarkable international distribution operation, thus assuring maximum profit during and after the film's domestic release (ibid., p. 214).

However, there were considerable competitors among the global film industries when cinema was just getting started. For example, France, Germany and Italy had prominent film industries, but Hollywood's advanced methods –the facilities, the expertise, the financial assets and the distribution possibilities– gave the American film industry strength that could not be matched by other countries (Thompson & Brodwell, 2003), and finally, the World Wars enabled Hollywood to become the biggest film industry in the global market (ibid., pp. 79, 191, 214).

The era of modern Hollywood has been said to have started in the 1970s (e.g. Behlil, 2016), and at the end of the same decade, the contemporary blockbuster had its first go (Wasser, 2010). The 70s, coincidentally, was also the decade when producing and distributing films became financially profitable for Hollywood (Potter, 2001, p. 219). In 1977, Steven Spielberg and George Lucas made films that were targeted for all audiences. Spielberg had *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and Lucas the first *Star Wars* (Wasser, 2010). Unlike in the Old Hollywood, where genre films were made for niche audiences, these films, which Wasser

(2010) recognizes as the launchers of the first cycle of contemporary blockbusters, were created purposefully by blending genres to target as many audience groups as possible (p. 84).

The blockbuster-formula started to feed itself quickly: the media were continuously writing about the whopping box office numbers, compelling people to see the newest films out of curiosity, thus increasing the numbers even more (Wasser, 2001, 2010, p. 87). The earning power of the new blockbuster didn't end to the movie theater cycle, they continued to grow revenue via rentals and franchise sales (Wasser, 2010, Thompson & Brodwell, 2003, p. 526). Due to the success, production companies gave more money to produce such films –and for their marketing (Wasser, 2010), which sealed the superior status of the blockbuster.

It is also important to recognize that while Hollywood is often perceived as pure America, it is an international podium for global financiers and brands. Behlil (2006) writes that “Hollywood is a brand, and it does not matter which country it belongs to as long as it's making profit” (pp. 35) and Rossenbaum (2000) states that the label of a film says America as it is the most appealing package for investors and the global audiences alike (p.133). Thus, the main goal of a contemporary Hollywood blockbuster is both national and global success and increasingly more attention is paid to the film's ability to make it big in foreign countries, starting from the very first production decisions (Danan, 2010).

Stringer (2003) argues that everyone who is in touch with global mass culture has at least a grasp of what kind of films blockbusters are, whether they engage in them or not (p. 1). Keeping in mind Strinati's definition of mass culture, it is evident that Hollywood's blockbuster process follows widely the same structure: the production companies decide the types of films that are produced and then distributed for the masses and make profit by doing so.

Furthermore, Hollywood's power over its audience has been historically recognized by both the society and the US government. In the 1930s, Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America -association (MPPDA) was pressured by the US government to initiate a self-censorship to the industry, which came to be known as the Production Code (Thompson & Brodwell, 2003, p. 216). Created mostly due to studies showing the effects that films can have on their audience, and due to the general conservative atmosphere, the Code demanded extreme lengths of censorship, denying the depicting of violence, homosexuality and aggressive language, just to name a few (ibid.).

Another similar turning point in the history of Hollywood censorship was the case of “the Hollywood blacklist” in the 1940s and 1950s (Thompson & Brodwell, 2003, p. 326). The US government was concerned about Hollywood films conveying un-American content to the audience, and the FBI looked for sympathizers of communism among Hollywood circles. Eventually a group of filmmakers, the “Hollywood ten”, were blacklisted and had to either leave Hollywood to work or use a pseudonym (ibid.).

Scholars have also established that visual media can have notable influence on its audience. For example, sociolinguist Lippi-Green (1997) states that “For better or for worse, the television and film industries have become a major avenue of contact to the world outside our homes and communities” (p.81) and per communication theorist Potter (2001), “the media can shape our opinions, beliefs, and values” (p. 262).

Potter demonstrates his claim by using a simple example of how a person watching a political speech on television can make an immediate decision of whether they like or dislike the speaker. This process of forming an opinion is mostly unconscious: “when a viewer is passive, [their] defenses are down. [They] are not aware that any learning is taking place and hence [they] are not actively evaluating and processing the information” (Potter, 2001, p. 265). He adds that when a person is consuming media, they can unconsciously learn new things without aiming to do so and that when we are repeatedly exposed to a familiar, existing idea it reinforces “the attitudes and beliefs we already hold” (ibid., 284).

I argue that Potter’s ideas are directly applicable to films. For example, once we hear and see a character in a film, we immediately form some opinion of them and we might do it unconsciously. While forming an opinion of a character has a relatively small impact on a person, but as Potter (ibid.) demonstrated, repetition can enforce any familiar idea, whether it is big or small.

Thus, as one of the leading visual mediums and a vital part of the global mass culture, Hollywood blockbusters can have a vast influence on shaping the immediate and the long-term beliefs of their audience. Furthermore, language, for example, is an immense part of how we perceive the characters we see in a film. The film dialogue is also a tool used to direct us to perceive a character in a certain way, the way the film wants us to. As will come apparent later in this paper, it is more the rule than the exception that film dialogues contain gendered language, thus possibly evoking and enforcing gender stereotypes.

2.2 Gender and the English Language

In the following sections, I shall first briefly discuss the contemporary views of gender. Next, I shall look at the main developments of language and gender research. I will present two key works on the topic that are also used as the main theoretical sources of this paper: Robin Lakoff's *Language and Woman's Place* (1975/2004) and Jennifer Coates' *Women, Men and Language* (1993). Finally, I shall discuss the gendered linguistic features that are used as the basis for my research.

2.2.1 Contemporary Views of Gender

Jones (2016) defines the concept of gender as follows: "gender concerns cultural norms about what roles and identities are considered to be appropriate for women or men, such as whether something is feminine or masculine" (p. 1). Jones adds that "it is important to note that gender in this sense is not a synonym for 'sex difference'".

Therefore, gender does not refer to the biological sex of a person, but to the learnt, socially constructed qualities that are and expressed, or more precisely, as explained by Butler (1990), *performed* by a person. These qualities can be external or internal. For example, in most western cultures, qualities such as wearing make-up or having a caring nature are associated with women, thus being regarded as feminine traits (Jones, 2016, p. 2). Moreover, one's gender identity does not necessarily correlate with one's biological sex, nor does it have to. As put by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003), "Sex is biological categorization based primarily on reproductive potential, whereas gender is the social elaboration of biological sex" (p. 10).

The two traditionally recognized genders, *male* and *female*, are hence socially constructed categories that entail the stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. This classification is also referred to as gender binary, which polarizes the two genders and sees them as opposites. The multiple genders that do not fit into the narrow and traditional views of gender, can thus be referred to as *non-binary*. Furthermore, from the standpoint of this paper, it is worth noting that language can be considered as a notable factor in the gender binary. Per Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003), it can be seen not only "[as a reflection of] pre-existing categories, but as part of what constructs and maintains these categories" (p. 34).

In the questionnaire conducted for my research, I have asked the participants to choose the gender they identify themselves as, the options being male, female and non-binary. I will return to the topic in section 3.5.4., where I discuss the ethical considerations of the questionnaire.

2.2.2 The Topic of Language and Gender in the Field of Sociolinguistics

For years, the topic of language and gender has been an interest in the field of sociolinguistics. The previous research shows that the acknowledged beliefs of gender differences in the English language are a common phenomenon not limited to a specific time, country or variety of English, which demonstrates the wide influence of language beliefs.

Lakoff's 1975 *Language and Woman's Place* was a groundbreaking step for the field. Lakoff introduced her view on how language systematically enforces the inferior status of women and presented linguistic features traditionally associated with women, briefly discussing stereotypical men's speech as well. Lakoff describes "women's language" as follows:

[It] shows up in all levels of grammar of English. We find differences in the choice and frequency of lexical items; in the situations in which certain syntactic rules are performed; in intonational and other supersegmental patterns (1975/2004, p. 43).

This definition implied that the differences in the ways women and men speak are noticeable on all levels of the English language, which evoked the discussion of gendered language and raised awareness of the gender bias in English, providing a starting point for future research. Although Lakoff (ibid) herself states that she does not mean "to suggest that either the methodology or the results are final, or perfect" (p. 40) and that "I am not talking about hundred-percent correlations, but rather, general tendencies" (p. 82), the study was critiqued and widely scrutinized because of the lack of scientific proof, as Lakoff based her claims mostly on her own observations and anecdotal evidence.

Some decade later, Jennifer Coates was one of the scholars who took Lakoff's observations and studied them more closely in her trailblazing book *Women, Men and Language*, which was first published in 1986. Coates' topic of interest was to find scientific evidence for the previously made claims of gender differences in English. She concluded that the language differences between women and men can be found in the social consequences of language rather than in the actual linguist features of speech, as Lakoff had suggested (Coates, 1993).

Coates recognized the linguistic features as stereotypes associated with the way women should talk, and her book provided additional evidence of the ways in which women and men are generally *believed* to be speaking. Coates (ibid.), too, honors Lakoff's work as a turning point in the history of sociolinguistics, while at the same time stated that the text made women's speech seem weak and meaningless (pp. 6) and that it suggested women should adapt to men's speech in order to survive in the "man's world" (ibid.). We shall return to the observations made by Lakoff and Coates in section 2.3.

On a more general note, it is important to recognize that the traditional language stereotypes come from the early discussions of the topic and from the traditional, conservative outlooks of the status of men and women in society. In her book *Man Made Language*, Spender (1985) voiced the unpleasant truth behind the early studies of language and gender in general. She suggested that as society is traditionally male dominated, so is the language, and when this field of study emerged, the fundamental basis for the research of language differences based on gender was that "there is something *wrong* with women's language, [and hence] research procedures have frequently been biased in the favor of men" (p. 7). Spender added that "[...] research procedures have been so embedded with sexist assumptions that investigators have been blinded to empirical reality" (p.32). Correspondingly, the assumptions of certain types of language belonging to a certain gender creates pressure, and Spender (ibid.) stated that there are consequences to a man speaking language associated with women and vice versa: "[...] women who use forms associated with men may be put down as aggressive and 'unfeminine'; men who 'talk like women' are called 'effeminate' and regarded with disdain" (p. 19).

Furthermore, the adoption of gendered language attitudes often begins early, not only via social interaction and exposure to media and culture, but biased language can be deeply structural. It's evident that the field of language and gender has conventionally strongly relied on the traditional understandings of gender, where gender and biological sex are considered as inseparable terms. However, subsequently we apprehend that the previous studies were in fact studying feminine and masculine qualities of language that are, like any other qualities, socially constructed.

I chose to base my theoretical approach on Lakoff (1975/2004), as I wanted to see whether the age-old stereotypes still hold their ground in people's minds when it comes to the linguistic stereotypes about women and men. Moreover, when deep-rooted stereotypes are studied, it makes sense to go back to where the conversation about those stereotypes first

started. Coates (1993) is an excellent counterpart for Lakoff, as mentioned above, it recognizes these features as stereotypes rather than scientific truths. In the next section, I shall discuss the remarks on gendered language made by Lakoff (1975/2004) and Coates (1993) in more detail. In addition, I will present additional academic studies relevant to my study's approach in order to provide a wider perspective to the gendered linguistics stereotypes.

2.3 Gendered Linguistic Features

In the following sections I will present the theoretical approach to my study as well as the linguistic features that were used in analyzing the language of female and male characters in contemporary Hollywood blockbusters. I will categorize the gendered linguistic features under the terms *women's language* and *men's Language* and discuss what remarks and claims have been made of them by Lakoff (1975/2004) and Coates (1993), as well as offer additional views of the features by discussing selected studies by other scholars.

2.3.1 Women's Language

The prominent linguistic features of women's language used in my research were *tag questions*, *terms of endearment*, *euphemisms*, *the intensive so*, and *empty adjectives*. These features will be discussed in the following sections.

2.3.1.1 Tag Questions

The tag question changes a statement into a question, for example when the speaker makes a remark: these roses have thorns, *don't they?* Lakoff (1975/2004) explains that thus the feature implies that the speaker is not completely sure of the statement they made, and that the speaker comes across as if they would need someone to confirm their statement. Lakoff continues that using the tag question weakens the position of the speaker, i.e. implying they do not trust the statement enough, as adding the question allows the possibility of them being wrong without the risk of embarrassment, or, in other cases, the speaker might try to avoid a conflict with the question's addressee (ibid., pp. 47-50). Hence, the tag question can be regarded as a feature of weak language and a feature of polite language, both qualities stereotypically associated with women's language.

Yet, the tag question is a relatively controversial feature and, due to it being both a statement and a question, a feature notoriously complicated in the studies of many linguists (e.g. Spender, 1985, p. 9). Lakoff (1975/2004) sees the feature as strongly feminine, but in fact,

studies suggest that male speakers may use tag questions more than women (Spender, 1985). Equally, Coates states that associating tag questions with women is, again, more an assumption than a fact. Yet, Coates also recognizes that studies have provided evidence that tag questions are a resilient language stereotype among English speakers (Coates, 1993, p. 119). Hence, due to the controversy, I decided to keep it as one of the features of women's language to study, to see how this feature would be perceived by the questionnaire's participants.

For example, a study by Siegler and Siegler (1976), showed that using tag questions was indeed a language belief associated with women. In the study, college students were presented with two variants of the same statement, the other containing a tag question (*ibid.*). The statements with a tag question were more associated with female speakers, and the results were even described as being "in complete accord with Lakoff's theory" (*ibid.*, p. 7), thus providing evidence of the tag question being a linguistic stereotype of women's language.

2.3.1.2 Terms of Endearment

A term of endearment refers to words such as "dear", "honey" and "sweetheart", i.e. nouns that indicate affection, and per Lakoff (1975/2004) it is a feature of women's language (p. 99). Lakoff writes that "it seems that women use these expressions under different conditions than men do" (p. 99), referring to her remark that while female speakers use these terms with people of any gender, even when they do not have romantic relationship with them, male speakers would appear to never address another male with those same terms (*ibid.*). Lakoff's claim was supported by Wolfson and Manes (1979), who looked at over 800 recorded interactions, of which 80% were service encounters and the rest different conversations between people, some familiar with each other (e.g. colleagues) and some strangers. They found instances in which women were addressed with a term of endearment, mostly by other women, and men were not, but there were no instances where men would be called with such intimate term and women would be not (*ibid.*, p. 22).

Even with no concrete evidence of women using terms of endearment more, there are many beliefs surrounding this feature, which makes it a good candidate for analyzing language attitudes. Boasso, Covert and Ruscher (2012) discussed terms of endearment as a part of their study on benevolent sexism and found that women hear men using terms of endearment with women more often than women use them with men. Furthermore, they suggest that terms of endearment "represent benevolent sexist beliefs, indicating that the addressees are in need of

protection” and that using these terms with women might “imply that they are weak and inferior and spread that stereotype of women in general” (ibid., p. 537), marking the feature as another quality to join the stereotypical beliefs of women using weak language.

2.3.1.3 Euphemisms

Euphemism is a feature of polite language that refers to language that does not contain any vulgar expressions, for example swearwords or taboo terms. A euphemism is principally a politer way of saying something that is considered impolite or bad. Per Lakoff (1975/2004), politeness is a part of women’s language that is, again, learned by children as they’re growing up, mostly due to the traditional attitude that “women are the preservers of morality and civility” (p.77), she also states that due to these social constructs “women are the experts at euphemism” (p. 80). This notion is supported by Spender (1985), who speculates that the root of women being more polite lies in the traditional hegemonic structure of society, where the inferior is supposed to be polite towards the superior, for example in a customer service situation. Thus, stating that in a society where a woman is traditionally the inferior party, they are also the politer one (p. 37).

Coates (1993) addresses the claim of women and euphemisms by discussing the results of studies that in fact only give evidence of women tending to avoid certain aspects of language considered “wrong”. For example, a study conducted in 1974 by Peter Trudgill examined speech in Norwich, which showed that women used noticeably less stigmatized forms in their speech, regardless of their social class (ibid., p. 70). A similar result was discovered in a study of Glaswegians by Ronald Macaulay in 1978, where the use of a highly stigmatized phonetic feature to the area, the glottal stop, was studied (ibid., pp.71, 78). Women in all social classes tended to use the glottal stop less, i.e. they tended to use more prestigious language (ibid., 1993, p.71).

Coates also (1993) recognizes that the stereotype of women’s politeness is “very widespread and has been current for many centuries” (p. 21), and states that when it comes to aggressive language, women attempt to avoid it, as “[women] try to avoid displays of verbal aggressiveness” and as “[women] tend to express conflict indirectly rather than directly” (p.191). This indicates that the social expectations of the way women should speak have influenced the ways women in reality, and in fiction media, end up using language. Equally, this fact applies to men as well, as the general belief is that men use more swear words and

vulgar expressions than women (ibid., 1993, p. 23). Swearing as a feature of men's language will be discussed further in section 2.5.3.

2.3.1.4 The Intensive *So*

The intensive *so* occurs when the speaker emphasizes the word *so*, for example when describing something: "they are *so* beautiful". In Lakoff 1975/2004, the *so*-intensifier, stated as typical for women, is described as a device the speaker would use when, for example, they do not dare to express how much they care for something, hence changing the rather neutral word *very* to the intensified *so* (p. 80). Lakoff suggests that "strong emotions" or "strong assertions" are thus not conveyed but hidden in the *so* (ibid.).

The results of studies on the subject vary. Bradac, Mulac and Thompson (1995) discovered that in general, women use more intensifiers than men, and that *so* occurred more often in women's speech. However, a study on the evolution of the *so*-intensifier by Kuha (2004) found no divide between the genders in the use of *so* when there were 65 participants, and moreover, Fahy (2000) studied the use of intensifiers in a computer conference and concluded that men used more intensifiers, but also that *so* was not among the intensifiers used often by men.

Yet, a study on the highly popular television program *Friends* indicated that within popular television, the stereotype of women using the *so*-intensifier strongly exists. Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005) studied the overall use of intensifiers in the show. Their corpus had a total of 1,886 instances of intensifiers, *so* being the most frequent with 832 instances (ibid., 2005). Furthermore, they found that *so* was used more than twice as much by the female characters of the show (ibid.). They also propose that this is a result of the female characters using a language that contains more emotion than the male characters and conclude that "*so* is tied to emotional language as well as to female speakers" (ibid., p. 290).

2.3.1.5 Empty Adjectives

Lakoff (1975/2004) argues that women use more language features that linguists call "meaningless" (p. 43). She suggests that niche words such as specific shades of color, *mauve* or *lavender*, for example, belong to a vocabulary almost nonexistent in men's language. She continues that alike words exist in adjectives that are used to express "the speaker's approbation or admirations for something" (ibid., p.45), also known as empty adjectives, such

as *sweet, lovely, divine, adorable, and cute*, for example. Lakoff even proposes, as those words are a part of women's language, that any group using such vocabulary can be regarded not only as "feminine" or "un-masculine" but as "uninvolved" or "out of power" (ibid., p.47). Likewise, Coates 1993 remarks that using empty adjectives is a linguistic feature associated with women but does not discuss the topic further (p. 18).

Hanafiyeh and Afghari (2014) conducted a study motivated by Lakoff's claims on women's language use. They asked 120 English L2 speakers to utter phrases from selected Hollywood films without knowing the gender of the original speaker (ibid., 2014). The phrases were in Persian, the participants' native language, and when the students reproduced the utterances in English, the women participants used more empty adjectives than men (ibid., 2014). The paper does not say whether the participants were aware that the phrases were taken from Hollywood films, but nevertheless, the results imply that English L2 speakers have, at least on some level, adopted gendered language features of English. From the perspective of this paper's topic, this is an interesting result that suggests that stereotypes in the English language could spread globally.

2.3.2 Men's Language

The prominent linguistic features of men's language used in my research were *interruption, commands* and *swearing*. These features will be examined below.

2.3.2.1 Interruption

Coates 1993 acknowledges conversational interruption as one of the distinctive linguistic features of men's language (p. 107). In her chapter on gender differences in communicative competence, she discusses a study conducted in 1975 by Zimmerman and West, which deals with conversational turn-taking (ibid., p. 108). Zimmerman and West had recorded spontaneously occurring conversations between a man and a man, a woman and a woman and a man and a woman (ibid., p. 109). They found that in general, the conversational turn-taking happened naturally, and that the conversation continued flowingly from one turn to the next (ibid.). However, the 11 conversations that took place between a man and a woman deviated. The male speakers interrupted the female speaker, and thus broke the rule of polite turn-taking, 46 times (ibid.). Within those same conversations, the female speakers interrupted the male speakers merely two times (ibid.). Similar results were not found in the same-sex

conversation pairs: within those 20 conversations, Zimmerman and West found a total of seven interruptions (ibid., p. 110).

Zhao and Gantz (2003) analyzed interruptions between male and female characters of fictive prime-time television. The data consisted of one week's prime time fictional television, from which a total of 435 interruptions were gathered (ibid.). Out of those interruptions, 63% percent were made by male characters (ibid.), which indicates that the stereotype is visible in fictional television shows, making conversational interruption a noteworthy feature of men's language to be examined in film characters as well.

2.3.2.2 Commands

A command, or a directive speech act, is an utterance that aims to get someone to do something, and a linguistic feature Coates 1993 states to be traditionally associated with men (p. 124). Likewise, Lakoff (1975/2004) briefly addresses the feature by describing that polite language, or as came apparent in previous sections, feminine language, does not use directive commands: "the more one compounds a request, the more characteristic it is of women's speech, the less of men's" (p. 51), thus suggesting that strong directives are exclusively associated with men.

Furthermore, this claim is supported with Goodwin's 1980 study, where a group of girls and a group of boys playing on a street in Philadelphia were observed. Goodwin found that the directives used by the boys and the girls diverged: the boys used explicit commands, whereas the girls favored more polite forms of commands (Coates, 1993, p. 124-125). Likewise, West 1990 studied the ways directives were used by male and female doctors. She discovered that male doctors' commands were stronger than the ones of female doctors (ibid.). The majority of the orders (31%, N=156) given by male doctors were imperative, such as "lie down" (ibid., p. 91), while the female doctors tended to use directives imbedded with modal verbs "could" and "can" (ibid., p. 97).

2.3.2.3 Swearing

As it became evident in section 2.4.3, women are generally associated with polite language and men subsequently with impolite language. Swearing is especially linked to stereotypical men's language, and per Coates the "folklinguistic belief that men swear more than women is widespread" (1993, p.126). Moreover, Lakoff (1975/2004) claims that men use stronger

expletives, naming phrases such as “oh dear” as a feature of women’s language, and more forceful words such as “shit” as a feature of men’s language (p. 44). Again, men’s swearing is another case of language attitudes, as pointed out by Coates (1993), who states that “there is little hard evidence on male/female differences in swearing” (p.126).

Coates (1993) introduces two studies conducted in 1974 and 1975 by Cheris Kramer, who examined attitudes towards gender differences in swearing by analyzing cartoon strip characters (p. 127). Kramer’s first study investigated *New Yorker*’s cartoon strips, where she found that the male characters swear more than the female characters, and asked students to choose whether they consider an utterance made by a cartoon character to be spoken by male or female (ibid.). The participants then named swearing as the feature that tilted them towards a male speaker (ibid.). A year later, Kramer studied the cartoon strips of four American magazines and asked the participants to similarly name the gender of the speaker of selected utterances, and again, female speakers were recognized according to the low density of swear words (ibid.).

Another study, conducted more than 30 years later, offers clear evidence that swearing has upheld its status depicting gender stereotypes. Jay and Janschewitz (2008) looked at students’ attitudes towards gender differences in swearing and occupation. The participants were given a list of different occupations and asked to state how likely it is for a male or a female of each occupation to use swearwords. Moreover, they were asked to consider how appropriate swearing would be for a male or a female (ibid.). The results upheld the stereotypical belief of swearing, as men were constantly anticipated to use more swearwords than women in the corresponding occupation (ibid.).

3. Methods

My primary objective was to combine both quantitative and qualitative data in my study as I wanted to use two approaches that together would make the results stronger. Thus, my principal dataset consists of quantitative and qualitative data gathered via a questionnaire.

My study's data collection occurred in two phases. First, I watched contemporary Hollywood blockbusters for dialogue excerpts that contained gendered linguistic features. These quotes from the dialogue were then used in the questionnaire, where the participants were asked to state which gender they associate the presented quotes with. In the second phase, the main data was then gathered via the questionnaire.

In this chapter, I first briefly revisit the theory and clarify why some linguistic features generally acknowledged as gender stereotypes were left out of my study. Next, I explain the process of how the examined films were chosen, as well as introduce the six selected films. Next, I present the questionnaire and discuss its structure, distribution and ethical considerations. Lastly, I discuss the hypotheses of my research.

3.1 Revising the Theory

Per Lakoff (1975/2004), hedging is one of the main features of women's speech (pp. 79), and consequently, I was planning to have it as one of the features to examine. However, after reading Coates' (1993) critique of hedging, I decided to leave it out. In her own previous study on hedging in single-sex conversations (Coates, 1993, 1989), Coates found that in a conversation taking place between two women, where the conversational topics were sensitive, the women used hedging as a way of dealing with taboo issues, such as child abuse or the fear of men (Coates, 1993, p.118). This concludes that while Coates does recognize that women use hedging, it is seemingly in purpose of protecting their conversational partner, and to discuss discreet subjects with caution (Coates, *ibid.*). Hedging from this perspective is hence a problematic feature to count as stereotypical of any gender. In addition, Lakoff (1975/2004) states that women tend to use more words like "kinda" and "well" (p.79), which today are commonly embedded in colloquial American English. Based on my own observations of the language used in contemporary blockbusters, this type of hedging was used rather equally by both female and male characters.

A similar issue occurred with using hypercorrect grammar, which Lakoff (1975/2004) names as typical for women. I noticed that in the films analyzed for this study, as in the world of fiction in general, a hypercorrect grammar is a character feature that does not, at least in most cases, have anything to do with the character's gender, but rather with some other qualities they might have. For example, using a hypercorrect grammar might suggest that a character is a nerd or a scholar (Bucholtz, 1999), and hence, from the perspective of this study it made sense to exclude this feature.

3.2 The Process of Selecting the Films

I wanted my data to be as relevant as possible. Since 2019 was too recent, as the total box office incomes were not in at the time I started my research, I chose to use the globally highest grossing top-10 films produced in the United States in 2018 (see Appendix A). However, I also did not want to limit the data to a one-year period, and thus, I decided to add the top-10 films of 2017 (see Appendix B) in order to get a wider range of films to analyze. The worldwide box offices of the 20 films varied between 650 million dollars (*Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindewald*) and 2 billion dollars (*Avengers: Infinity War*).

From these 20 films considered for the analysis, I chose six films, three from each year. I started to narrow down the options by first eliminating animation films, since they contained animal or fantasy characters, which are not applicable for my study's purpose. Also, *Bohemian Rhapsody* was not fitting for the study, as it contained a lot of original song lyrics, which I felt were not applicable as film dialogue. Also, it was based on real events and real people and had a lot of documental qualities, thus I felt that it differed stylistically too much from the other films.

Next, I decided to leave out films where the dialogue did not offer a wide enough repertoire of linguistic features suitable for the study, or where the language would be too easy to connect to a particular film franchise. These films were *The Fate of the Furious*, *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* and *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindewald*. The dialogues in these films were problematic as they contained a lot of recognizable vocabulary. For example, in the case of *The Last Jedi*, any suitable dialogue for the analysis contained special terminology and terms unique to the franchise, such as *lightsaber*, which could have affected the participants' presumptions of the speaker's gender.

After eliminating the afore mentioned films, 13 remained. The following films were selected: *Beauty and the Beast* (2017), *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle* (2017), *Wonder Woman* (2017), *Aquaman* (2018), *Jurassic World: The Fallen Kingdom* (2018) and *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018). All the chosen films had stereotypically gendered characters and plots that conform to traditional Hollywood films, which made them equal in that sense and hence easy to compare. I watched the films either online on Netflix or purchased them as iTunes MPEG-4 video files from Apple. Below, I give a brief synopsis of each film.

As a classic fairytale, *Beauty and the Beast* contained typical portrayals of femininity and masculinity, and moreover, strongly juxtaposes the main male and female characters, which made the film a good candidate for this study. In the story, Belle (Emma Watson), a resident of a French village, is captured in a castle by the Beast (Dan Stevens), who used to be an unkind prince, now cursed by a witch. The curse can only be unbroken if, despite his Beastly appearance, someone falls in love with him. In time, Belle and the Beast, now less aggressive and inconsiderate, have managed to fall in love. But when Belle sees through a magic mirror that his father is in trouble, she heads to save him. With the same mirror, the villagers see Beast as a threat and an angry mob marches to the castle to kill him. Ultimately, Belle manages to get to the castle in time and confess her love for the Beast, who then along with the castle's staff get back their human form.

I settled on *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle*, when I discovered that the film had an interesting setting gender wise: a teenage girl is portrayed by a middle-aged man. Likewise, as an action-survival film, there are genre stereotypes that were bound to pit the male and female characters against each other. Moreover, the film followed traditional gender stereotypes. The film is set in a video game called Jumanji, which the teen characters Spencer (Alex Wolff), Fridge (Ser'Darius Blain), Bethany (Madison Iseman) and Martha (Morgan Turner), get trapped in. Since there is only one female character playing the game, Bethany gets stuck inside a male character, Dr. Shelby Oberon (Jack Black). Eventually, the players figure out that they must play the videogame through to get back to the real world. The game has several levels, which all have different challenges to overcome. While there, they find a fifth character, also a male, and together they manage to beat all enemies and finish the videogame's levels and get back to reality.

I chose *Wonder Woman* not only because it features a female character in the lead, but also because it was the only film that was directed by a woman. The story takes place in the

Second World War and begins when the German troops bomb US army pilot Steve Trevor's (Chris Pine) plane, who then ends up in the waters of Themyscira, a hidden island of the Amazons, where he meets Diana (Gal Gadot), the future Wonder Woman. As the daughter of the Amazon queen, Diana has been trained to be strong enough to kill the God of War, Ares, who they believe is corrupting humans to fight the war. Diana leaves with Steve to the front line, where she is shocked by human behavior and despite being told not to, takes matters in to her own hands and eventually manages to find and destroy Ares. Wonder Woman then decides to stay in the human world as its guardian.

Aquaman is a great counterpart for *Wonder Woman*. They both are character-driven films that tell the origin story of a DC Comics superhero. Moreover, the male characters in this film were very aggressive and warmongering, while the only two notable female characters operated in the background. *Aquaman* tells the story of how the half-human, half-merman Arthur (Jason Momoa) became the Aquaman, and how he eventually ends up as the king of Atlantis and the protector of humans. Arthur's mother Atlanna (Nicole Kidman) was the queen of Atlantis, which makes him the rightful heir to the throne. However, Atlanna had another son, the cruel King Orm (Patrick Wilson) and Arthur's visit to Atlantis turns into a violent pursuit for the throne that escalates into a war on land and sea.

I chose *Jurassic World: The Fallen Kingdom* as it had both a male and a female lead and interesting portrayals of how these two characters deal with stress in the survival game against dinosaurs and a natural disaster. Moreover, the utterances of the characters in crisis situations differed immensely. In the film, dinosaur specialists, who are also exes, Claire Dearing (Bryce Dallas Howard) and Owen Grady (Chris Pratt), are on a mission to save the remaining dinosaurs of the former amusement park called Jurassic World located on Isla Nubular, where a volcano is erupting. While on the island, they discover that the rescue operation is a conspiracy to sell the dinosaurs to investors, and they are left behind to fight for their lives. Ultimately, they manage to survive and attack the conspiring company, saving some of the dinosaurs.

Avengers: Infinity War was a natural choice in the sense that it was the highest grossing film out of all the 20 films. Likewise, Marvel Comic's Avengers is one of the world's biggest franchises and it makes hundreds of millions of dollars yearly with its films and merchandise, hence being highly influential (Mangan, 2018). Furthermore, as there were four Marvel films in total, I chose to take *Infinity War* as it is an ensemble film that includes the characters from

all the other films, thus offering a variety of dialogues to examine. In the film, the Avengers, a super group including familiar characters such as Hulk (Mark Ruffalo), Thor (Chris Hemsworth) and the Black Widow (Scarlett Johansson) must put their differences aside and come together to beat the powerful and evil Thanos (Josh Brolin), who is attempting to collect all infinity stones, which in his possession could potentially destroy the universe. The fight leads them to Wakanda, the home of the Black Panther (Chadwick Boseman), where the war for the infinity stones takes place.

3.2.1 The Process of Selecting the Film Quotes

The second step of the first phase was to select the quotes that would be used in the questionnaire. My goal was to choose quotes that would together offer as big a spectrum of the gendered linguistic features as possible, and to have at least one quote from each film. I aimed to have quotes that would contain only one linguistic feature, so that the results would be clearer. I also kept in mind that the quotes should not contain any proper nouns such as names or places, to avoid any connotations to a film or to a gender. However, all the usable quotes with the intensive *so* happened to include a proper noun, hence, in the quote chosen the proper noun *Gaston* was changed to [him].

I started by carefully observing each film. I looked for the gendered linguistic features of women's language and men's language in the characters' speech and transcribed scenes with suitable dialogue. I did not look at the gender of the characters but focused solely on the linguistic features, as the characters' actual gender was not relevant for my study.

I took the same approach for the quote-selecting process as I had taken with the films, and began with eliminating unsuitable quotes. I began by removing quotes that had overlapping linguistic features, first from each individual film and then from all the quotes that were considered, prioritizing the films that had fewer suitable quotes. Then, I removed quotes that were too short, even though they would have contained gendered language; for example "oh my goodness" (*Jurassic World: The Fallen Kingdom*). Similarly, for the sake of convenience, quotes more than four lines long were removed. If a quote had more than one linguistic feature in it, I kept the ones that had linguistic features associated with same gender. Finally, after settling on the selected quotes, I re-watched each scene and revised the transcriptions to avoid any mistakes in the transcriptions.

3.3 The Questionnaire

A questionnaire was chosen for my study's method of data collection as I was interested in the first reactions that the dialogue excerpts, the quotes, can evoke when they are taken out of their original context, and furthermore, the immediate associations they can provoke. I was equally interested in the participants' opinions and comments on why they associate the quotes to the gender they chose. Thus, the questionnaire offered the possibility to collect both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously, in a simple and effective manner.

For the questionnaire, I chose to use the form application at E-lomake.fi, which is a software created and maintained by the University of Helsinki. The site provided all the tools for the needed functions. The data could be directly retrieved as a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, which made analyzing the data convenient, since I used Excel for analysis the data and creating the charts for the analysis section.

Moreover, the safety of my study's and the participants' data was one of my main priorities. The data was stored on my password protected computer to which no one else had access to and the questionnaire and the data management was designed in accordance with the European Union General Data Protection Regulation. The privacy policy will be discussed further in section 3.3.3.

3.3.1 Piloting and Distribution

The questionnaire was piloted twice. First, it was piloted and reviewed by seven of my student peers. After discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the questionnaire with the group, I spellchecked and refined the texts of the questionnaire as well as modified them based on the given feedback. The peer feedback suggested that the option of "I'm not sure" would be added to the part of the questionnaire, where the participants are asked to identify the gender of the quotes' speaker. This was a valuable addition to the questionnaire. This way the participants would not be forced to choose either female or male if they truly would have no opinion as making someone choose in that situation would have distorted the results.

The second piloting consisted of four participants, who were asked to read the instructions and report if they were unclear, test that the link to the privacy policy document functioned properly, complete the questionnaire and inform if there was anything that would strike them as being complicated or if they saw any mistakes. In addition, I asked the participants to time

their answering process to see if my evaluation of it taking around ten minutes was accurate, which it turned out to be. No additional changes were made after the second piloting, excluding a few spelling mishaps in the introduction.

The participants of both pilot phases were asked not to participate in the questionnaire after its publication, as taking it again would surely affect their answers. Lastly, before publication, I tested that the questionnaire functioned properly on different browsers (Safari, Firefox, Google Chrome and Internet explorer) and on different devices (computer and mobile), to avoid any faults once the questionnaire was published. All data gathered via piloting was deleted.

I distributed the questionnaire via the online community Reddit and international student groups on Facebook, as well as my own private Facebook page. These platforms allowed me to reach not only Finnish people with different demographic backgrounds but also participants from all around the United States. When it comes to getting participants from the United States, I found distributing the questionnaire this way highly successful as it ensured that the participants were indeed from different parts of the country as opposed to them all being from the same state or from the same social circles, which would have been likely if I had sent the questionnaire to the mailing list of an American university, for example. The questionnaire was online for three weeks, during which time it gained 100 responses.

3.3.2 Structure

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The questionnaire opens with the introductory page (see Appendix C). The introduction first stated that in order to participate, the respondents must either 1) speak Finnish as their native language and have knowledge of English or 2) speak American English as their native language. Next, the participants were provided with the instructions on how to fill the questionnaire. Likewise, the introduction established the study's purpose and told the participants that the quotes they would evaluate are from recent Hollywood films.

Furthermore, the introduction states that by proceeding, the participants give their consent for the questionnaire's owner to use the answers in their master's thesis and that the results will be handled anonymously and are used for research purposes only. The introduction was visible for the participants throughout the questionnaire. Furthermore, the introduction

included a link to a PDF of the privacy policy, which will be further discussed in the next section.

Immediately after the introduction, the participants were asked to give basic background information in the form of three demographic questions (see Appendix D). The background information consisted of indirect identifiers: the gender one identifies as, their age group and their native language. First, the participants chose whether they identify as female, male or non-binary or if they would rather not say. Next, the participants were to choose the age group they belong to from the following choices: Under 18 years old, 18–23 years old, 24–30 years old, 31–36 years old, 37–43 years old, 44–54 years old, 55–64 years old, 65 years or older. And lastly, the participants answered if their native language is English or Finnish.

In the second part, the participants were given ten quotes from the analyzed films. The quotes were presented to the participants one by one. After each quote, the participants chose which gender they associate the quote with, from three choices: 1) female 2) male 3) I'm not sure (see Appendix E). After that the participants could answer an optional open-ended question "why do you think that?" (see Appendix E). Eight of the quotes were single line quotes with one speaker, and two of the quotes had more than one line and two speakers. In those two quotes, the individual lines were marked with "Speaker A" and "Speaker B" (see Appendix E). The tenth question asked the participants to assess both the genders of Speaker A and Speaker B (see Appendix E).

3.3.3 Ethical Considerations of the Questionnaire

As discussed before, this study sees gender as the one we identify ourselves as, hence the participants were asked to select the gender they identify as (see Appendix D). Often, demographic questions that ask for the participant's gender offer the choice of "male", "female" and "other". In addition to wanting to separate the concepts of gender and biological sex, I wanted to remove the association to "otherness" from the gender identities that do not fit to the gender binary, and hence, decided to use the option non-binary. Moreover, as stated above, no one was forced to share their gender identity. Even though the questionnaire is completely anonymous, it can be pressuring for someone to state the gender they identify as, especially if they feel that they don't know or that their personal preferred gender identity does not match any of the offered choices.

Furthermore, a privacy policy was made following the guidelines of the University of Helsinki and in accordance with the EU GDPR. As mentioned before, a link to the PDF of the privacy policy was available in the introduction (see Appendix C) for the participants to view at any time during the questionnaire, and it was also available for download, if someone would have wished to save it and return to it later.

When conducting a questionnaire that includes intellectual property such as quotations from films, and especially if it is for the benefit of scientific research, copyright can be a challenge. The quotes are copyrighted material and therefore they need to be attributed, but placing the copyright information right after the quotes would drastically impact the answers. Seeing the title of film could evoke associations in the participants, whether they have seen the film or not. One possible choice was to have a section in the questionnaire where the participants would have chosen which quote was from which film. However, after making a mockup of such a section I realized it was rather complicated for the participants, and furthermore, it was something that would not offer anything relevant for my research. After long consideration, I decided to add the quotes' copyrights below the tenth and last question (see Appendix F), where they would be visible for the participants. This is not the ideal choice, but as stated previously, the copyright information had to be visible, and for the sake of this research, it is better to present it after rather than before the participants saw the quotations.

3.3.4. Problematic Aspects

When conducting an online based questionnaire, there are always some general problematic aspects. Firstly, as the participants are not supervised, there is no way to tell how focused or how serious they are when they are taking the questionnaire. However, the optional open question "why do you think that?" was rather frequently answered and no participant answered inappropriately, which reassured me that the participants took the questionnaire seriously. Moreover, as one of the main places of distribution took place in Facebook student groups, I felt confident that the fellow academics would sincerely answer with the best of their ability.

The age distribution of the questionnaire turned out to be a bit problematic. Most of the participants were young adults as 48% of the participants were between 24–30 years old. This questionnaire, as any online based content, was doubtless more reachable for younger people, thus, the older age groups were not represented that strongly, which might have biased the

results to some extent. Still, as becomes apparent in the results chapter, the age based analysis offers interesting insights. The age distribution of the participants will be discussed in more detail in section 5.1.

3.4 The Hypotheses

The analysis of the questionnaire's results is based on the three demographic identifiers *age*, *gender* and *native language*. My hypotheses for this study are the following: 1 a) linguistic stereotypes are recognized by the participants and 1 b) the participants will be able to name at least some of these linguistic features in the answers to the open-ended question; 2) there will be a difference in the results between people who identify as female and with people who identify as male; 3) older people (44–64) presumably stick more to the linguistic gender stereotypes than the participants in the younger age groups; 4 a) swearing will be almost exclusively associated with male speakers; and 4 b) terms of endearment will be almost exclusively associated with female speakers, and lastly, 5) that the linguistic gender stereotypes in Hollywood blockbusters have spread from the United States to Finland, i.e. the L1 of the participants will not show in the results as much as age group and gender is assumed to. The realization of these hypotheses will be discussed in section 5.3.

4. Results

In this chapter I present both the quantitative and qualitative results of the questionnaire. I begin by presenting the participants' background information. The questionnaire's results are categorized under the gendered linguistic features discussed in the background chapter, and as mentioned above, each of the features appeared from one to four quotes in the questionnaire.

4.1 Demographic Results

GENDER		AGE		L1	
FEMALE	63	UNDER 18	5	FINNISH	64
MALE	32	18-23	17	ENGLISH	36
NON-BINARY	3	24-30	48		
I'D RATHER NOT SAY	2	31-36	17		
		37-43	8		
		44-54	2		
		55-64	3		
		65 +	0		

Table 1: Background information of the participants

The questionnaire was filled by 100 participants, out of which all submissions were eligible. There was no inappropriateness in the answers to the open-ended questions nor were there cases where someone would have clearly rushed through the questions by answering “female” to every question, for example. The two participants who wished to not state their gender identity were not accounted in the gender-based analysis of the data, and moreover, there were only three participants who stated their gender identity as *non-binary*, and hence, their answers were not included in the gender-based feature analysis. However, their answers were included in the age and native language parts of the analysis.

Out of the 100 participants, 63% were female, 32% were male, the aforementioned 3% were non-binary and 2% did not wish to share their gender identity. Since there were no participants over the age of 65, and in total only five participants aged 44–54 and 55–64 (see Table 1), the latter two age groups were merged for the analysis. Moreover, as a clear majority (48%) of the participants were aged 24–30, I decided to merge the categories of under 18 and aged 18–23, as well as the categories of 31–36 and 37–43, to balance out the categories and make presenting the data clearer. My initial plan was to merge all categories from 31 to 64; however, once I examined the answers of the participants in the group 44–54

and 55–64, I noticed that in most questions their answers deviated from the other age groups, which was a relevant and an interesting result. Thus, four age groups were used in the final analysis: under 23 (22%), 24–30 (48%), 31–43 (25%) and 44–64 (5%).

64% of the participants had Finnish as their native language and 36% of the participants had American English. I hoped to have roughly the same number of speakers of both languages, and the division could have been a bit more even, but as I am looking at whether these stereotypes are recognized by Finnish speakers, the division worked out well.

Finally, the data was categorized in Excel sheets based on the independent variables *gender*, *age* and *native language (LI)*. In the following sections I first present an overview of the results, and then proceed to show the results based on the linguistic features included in each of the questionnaire's questions based on the demographic identifiers: *gender identity*, *age* and *LI*.

4.2 General findings

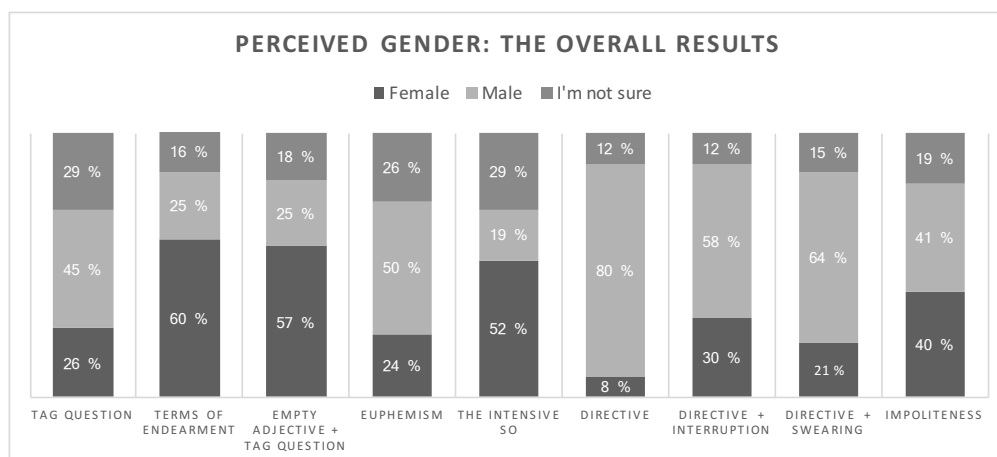


Figure 1: An overview of the questionnaire's results (N=100)

Figure 1 shows an overview of the quantitative results of the questionnaire's 100 responses. Each bar represents a linguistic feature/features that were included in the film quote of each question. The definitions of the features can be found in Chapter 2. For this overview, I calculated the averages of the two questions that looked at terms of endearment and the two questions that looked exclusively at tag questions.

The main finding from the overall results is that language based gender stereotypes were recognized. As can be seen, the option "I'm not sure" was chosen notably little overall, indicating that the participants had distinctive opinions of the speaker's gender. Another

important finding is that the more distinctively a feature was associated with a particular gender, the less the participants responded “I’m not sure”, which suggests that those stereotypes were recognized more often, and hence, considered stronger than others. For example, this can be seen in the *directive* -bar and in the *terms of endearment* -bar.

Moreover, these results show that using terms of endearment, an empty adjective and an intensive *so*, linguistic features stereotypically associated with women’s language, were indeed more associated with a female speaker, terms of endearment being the most frequently associated one with 60% (N=100) of the participants assuming the speaker to be female. Likewise, directives, swearing and interruption, all stereotypes of men’s language, were clearly more associated with male speakers by the participants. The quote which solely focused on the use of directives was the most associated one out of the quotes, with 80% (N=100) of the participants stating that they associate it with a male speaker. Simultaneously, it was also the feature most distinctively associated to a particular gender out of all the features.

The quotes with tag questions, a stereotype of women’s language, were in fact associated with male speakers more, as 45% of the participants associated it with men and 26% with women (N=100). Similarly, though being a men’s speech stereotype, impoliteness was not clearly associated to a particular gender, since 40% said the speaker was female and 41% assumed that the speaker was male (N=100).

4.3 The Features in Relation to the Demographic Identifiers

As mentioned above, the following sections present the results of each question of the questionnaire based on the demographic identifiers. Each figure shows the results first based on the age group, then the gender and the L1 of the participants. The headings of the figures are the film dialogue quotes that the participants were asked to evaluate in each question. Each section looks at one linguistic feature. I first present the quantitative results and then the selected answers given by the participants to the optional open-ended question “why do you think that?” i.e. the qualitative results.

In addition to the overall results, the general trends of the identifier-based quantitative results were that 1) On average, there were no extreme differences between the answers of the different demographic identifier groups; 2) L1 English speakers tended to answer “I’m not sure” more often than the L1 Finnish speakers; 3) The answers of L1 English speakers and the

age group of under 23 were similar in multiple questions; 4) The participants recognized the stereotypes of men's language noticeably more than those of women's language; 5) The answers of the age group 44–64 deviated greatly from the other groups; and 6) There were no substantial differences between the answers of male and female participants.

Furthermore, the general trends of the qualitative results were that 1) The same linguistic feature or some other specified factor in the same quote was often associated with both a male and a female speaker by the participants; 2) The semantics of the quote and the ways it was perceived by the participants influenced their answers remarkably; 3) The participants also named non-linguistic stereotypes that influenced their answers; and 4) There were several instances where multiple answers indicated that the participants didn't consider anything in a quote to be gendered. These observations, as well as those of the quantitative results listed above, will be discussed in-depth in Chapter 6.

4.3.1 Tag Questions

Figure 2 and Figure 3 show the results of the two quotes that contained tag questions. As these figures show, the results diverged quite greatly.

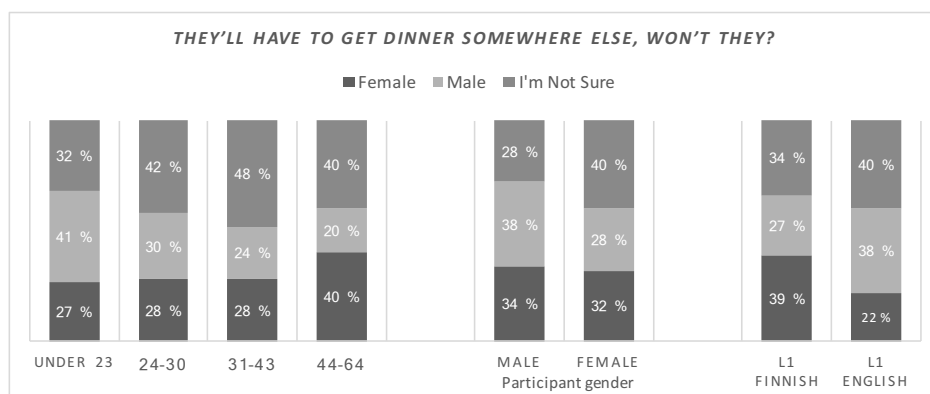


Figure 2: Tag Question 1

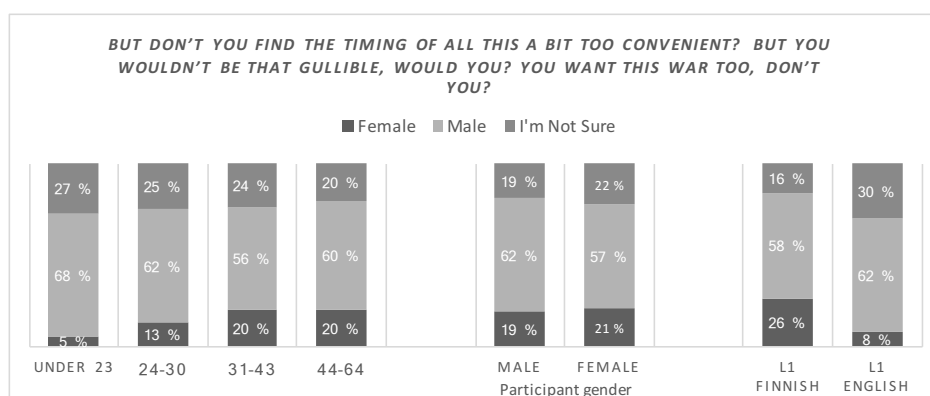


Figure 3: Tag Question 2

As seen in figure 2, most participants under 23 years old as well as the slight majority of male participants thought that the speaker was male. Likewise, the slight majority of L1 Finnish speakers thought the speaker was female. In all the other groups, most participants were unsure about the gender, or hesitant to state the speaker was either male or female. Moreover, the participants were generally more uncertain of the gender of this quote's speaker than that of the other quotes. However, as can be seen, the percentages are extremely similar and rather dispersed: there are no clear peaks.

However, in Figure 3, we see the opposite: the results are close to identical in all groups. All groups assumed the quote to be uttered by a male speaker, the only slight deviation being that 26% (N= 64) of the L1 Finnish speakers stated the speaker as female, while the same in all other groups was between 5–21%.

The open answers to the quote seen in Figure 2 revealed the most common reason for the vast number of unsure responses:

- (1) *Flippant and arrogant tone, but hard to guess gender based on that.*
- (2) *It sounds like it was said by an annoyed person. Anyone can be annoyed.*
- (3) *Anyone can make assumptions* [translated from Finnish by the author].

These answers demonstrate that a lot of the perceptions the quote evoked didn't have anything to do with gender. Many answers also suggested that the quote in Figure 2 was heard in an aggressive tone, which then induced associations to a male speaker:

- (4) *This person is unkind, therefore male.*
- (5) *Seem's [sic] stern. Masculine use.*
- (6) *Coldness and disregard for others*

Furthermore, the topic of war in the quote shown in Figure 3 explains the consistent number of *male* responses, as the following instances revealed:

- (7) *Men talk about war.*
- (8) *Talking about war, being condescending "gullible", manipulative steering as questions repeated.*

(9) *Discussion about war, indicates man in position of power.*

(10) *I associate war with men...*

These opposing results indicate that the tag question was not seen as a linguistic feature with gender connotations and demonstrated the influence of other factors that the participants took from the quotes.

4.3.2 Empty Adjective + Tag Question

As can be seen in Figure 4, most participants clearly associated the quote containing both an empty adjective and a tag question with a female speaker. There are only slight differences between the groups in general.

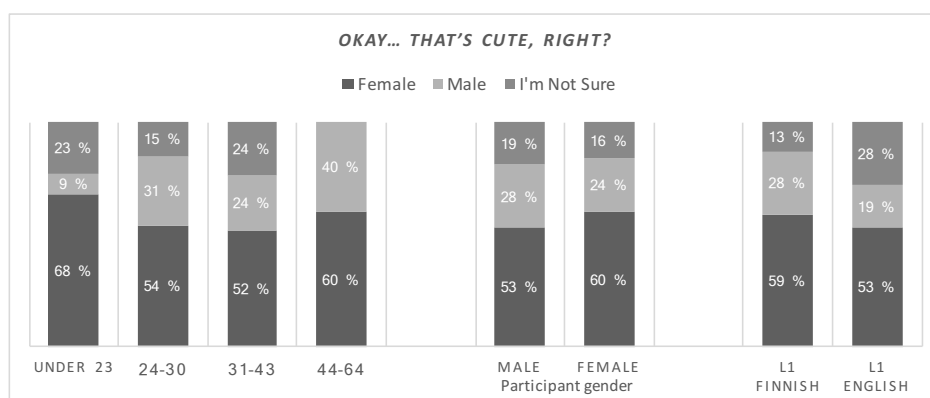


Figure 4: Empty Adjective + Tag Question

Answers to the open-ended questions revealed that the term of endearment “cute” was strongly considered as a feminine feature, but the tag question in the quote was recurrently associated with a male character, as examples 14 and 15 demonstrate.

(11) *Cute is a word that only women use.*

(12) *Vute [sic] is a very feminine term.*

(13) *Cute is a word that only women and gay people use.*

(14) *To me this sounds like something a man would say because of the "right?" question at the end [...].*

(15) *I can't help but think of a stereotypical male character who justifies or normalizes his questionable behavior because it's supposed to be viewed as part of his allure or charm.*

4.3.3 Terms of Endearment

Figure 5 and Figure 6 show the results of the quotes that solely contained a term of endearment.

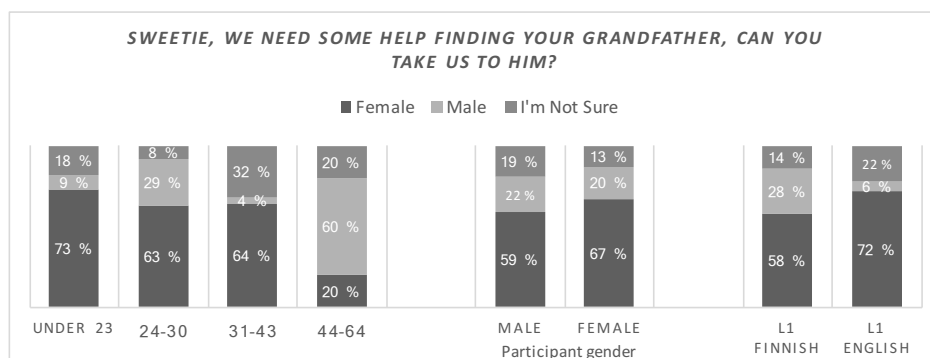


Figure 5: Terms of Endearment 1

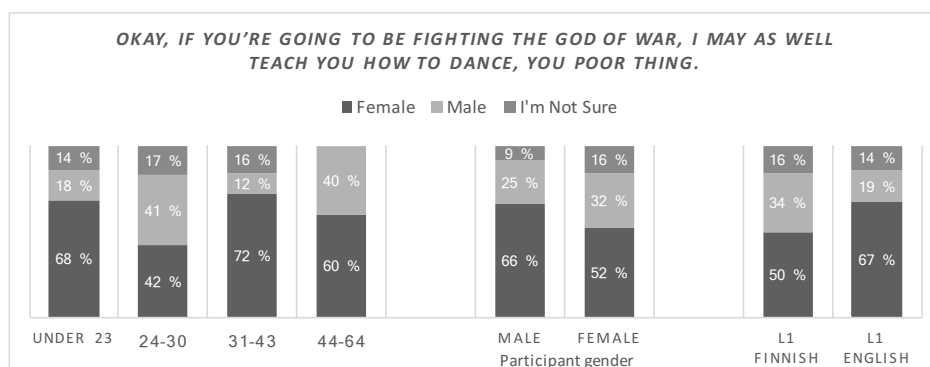


Figure 6: Terms of Endearment 2

The quote in Figure 5 was associated more with a female speaker by all groups, except for the age group of 44–64, where 60% (N=5) said they associate it with a male speaker. In multiple answers the word “sweetie” was the factor that made the participants assume the speaker to be female.

(16) *I choose to go with a woman speaker because of the stereotype of women being more soft-spoken in general, especially towards children.*

(17) *females are more likely to use petnames [sic].*

(18) *most of the time the person saying the word "sweetie" is female, in my experience.*

Moreover, the participants who were not sure of the speaker’s gender commented on their answers, which then indicated that by some the quote was seen as not containing gendered

language, even though in example 19 the term of endearment as a linguistic feature was recognized.

(19) *this type term [sic] of endearment word is used by both male and female in general.*

(20) *First it was female, then on second reading it was male...*

Another aspect that came up notably often when the participant was not sure about the speaker's gender was that using the term "sweetie" was associated with children, or moreover, especially with a female child as example 23 indicated.

(21) *[...] sounds like something said to a child, but anyone could talk to a child this way.*

(22) *They're probably talking to a child [...].*

(23) *Either way its directed at a girl but not sure who said it.*

Similarly, the quote in Figure 6, which contains the term of endearment *you poor thing*, was more associated with a female speaker by all groups, excluding 24 to 30-year-olds, who associated the quote almost equally to both males and females. There wasn't much uncertainty with this quote as the percent of "I'm not sure" responds remained notably under 20 in all groups. In addition to naming *you poor thing* as the factor that they based their answer on, the participants also perceived the quote in general as having features associated with femininity, as the following examples show:

(24) *Dancing and speaking softly to the other person makes me think of a woman again.*

(25) *Also you poorthing [sic] is something a man would't [sic] say to a man cause [sic] there's something motherly about it.*

(26) *Females are more sympathetic/empathetic.*

4.3.4 Euphemism

Figure 7 shows the results of the quote with the euphemism *fricking*.

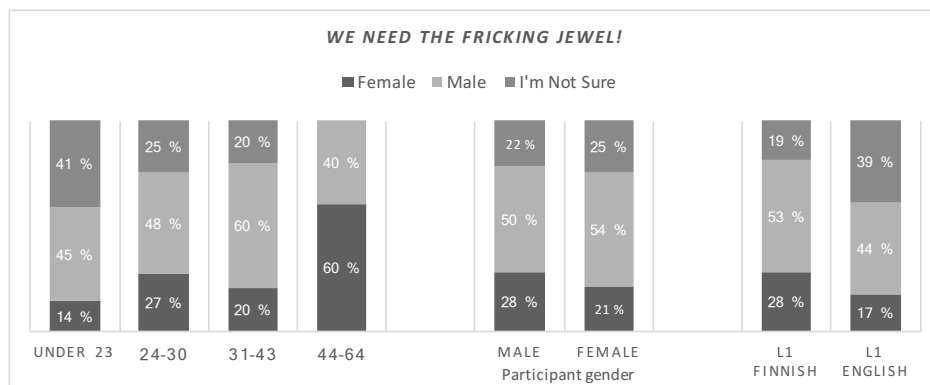


Figure 7: Euphemism

The quote was generally more associated with a male speaker, again excluding the participants aged 44–64, the majority of whom said the speaker is female. Moreover, in comparison to the other groups, only a slight majority of the participants aged under 23 and of the participants with L1 English said the speaker was male. In addition, noticeably many said “I’m not sure”.

The 31 to 43-year-olds were more confident of the speaker being male than the other groups, with 60% (N=25) assuming the speaker to be male. The answers to the open-ended question revealed that the unsure participants considered the quote as rather universal.

(27) *Pretty generic quote.*

(28) *There isn't anything that's feminine, nor anything that's masculine.*

(29) *[...] anyone could say this - the language used gives no clues.*

However, the nature of the quote was also frequently perceived as aggressive, which proved to be the main reason for it to be associated with a male speaker, as the following examples show.

(30) *It seems aggressive and I associate aggressive behaviour with men.*

(31) *Aggressive nature.*

(32) *Lack of patience, and the word 'fricking'.*

Similarly, swearing, even when not using “proper” swear words, was acknowledged as something exclusive to men in the context of Hollywood.

(33) *Leaning toward man because I think men are more likely to be given lines with swearing, even fake/soft swearing.*

(34) *I'm used to men being the ones swearing [...].*

Still, there were also several participants who said the speaker was female and recognized the euphemism, as examples 35–37 show.

(35) *Instead of cursing, they use 'fricking'.*

(36) *Instead of a swear word, the speaker uses a less vulgar expression here. The stereotype of soft-spoken women comes to my mind again.*

(37) *A man would have said "fucking".*

4.3.5 The Intensive So

Figure 8 shows that the quote with an intensive *so* was generally associated with a female speaker by all groups, except, again, by the majority of 44 to 64-year-olds, who believed the speaker to be male.

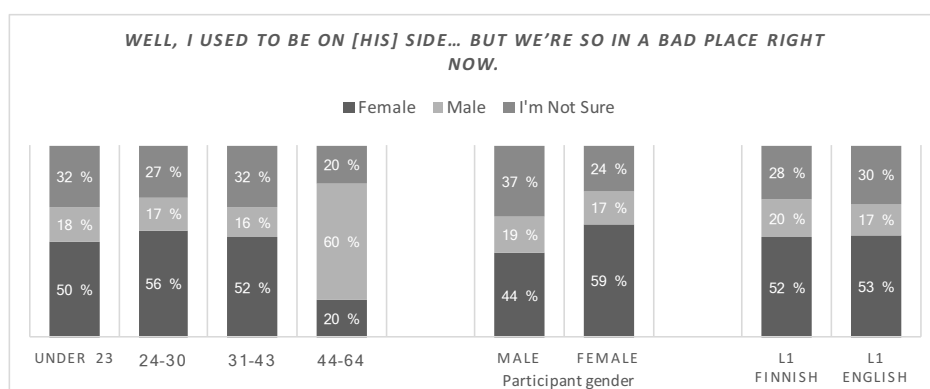


Figure 8: *The intensive so*

Another exception here was that the male participants were more unsure about the speaker's gender in this quote than any of the other groups were, and, moreover, more unsure than they were of any other quote. Otherwise, all the groups, again, answered very similarly.

In the open answers, a few participants said that the intensive *so* made them choose a female speaker. Yet, as example 40 shows, the same feature also gave some the connotation of a male speaker.

(38) *The extra "so" makes it sound like a woman.*

(39) *"we're SO in a bad place".*

(40) *The grammar "we're so in a bad place" is a bit wonky and that makes me think young man [sic] because it's less formal.*

Furthermore, the open-ended answers showed that the quote evoked a lot of other stereotypes that deal with what women generally are expected to talk about (examples 41 and 42) as well as with the expectation of the type of relationships shown in Hollywood films (example 43).

(41) *When characters are talking about human relations it was often females talking about a man. [...].*

(42) *[...] probably two women talking about men"*

(43) *I assume that this is a heterosexual relationship because the odds are better [...].*

4.3.6 Directive

As Figure 9 shows, the quote solely containing directives was linked to a male speaker by a clear majority of the participants and there was very little uncertainty about that. The male participants were the most sure of the gender, with 94% (N=32) of them assuming the speaker was male. And as mentioned above, this quote overall had the most straightforward result out of all the quotes.

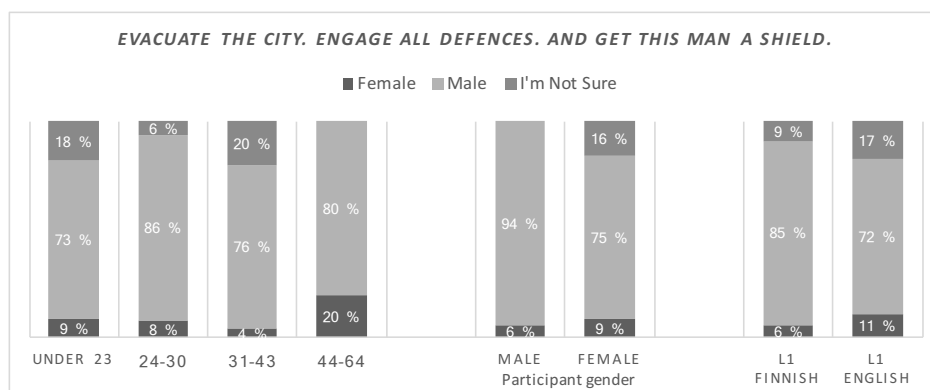


Figure 9: Directive

The participants associated the quote to a male speaker precisely due to the directive commands, as the following examples demonstrate.

(44) *Demanding [sic] action from others, exercising power over others, therefore male.*

(45) *Strict commands, also war-related lingo.*

(46) *[...] Straight to the point kind of speaking.*

(47) *The speaker is giving orders so the odds are it's a man.*

In addition to the directives, as with the quote in Figure 2 above, the topic of war was also associated to men as example 45 shows.

4.3.7 Directive + Interruption

In Figure 10, the participants were asked to state the gender of Speaker B (underlined).

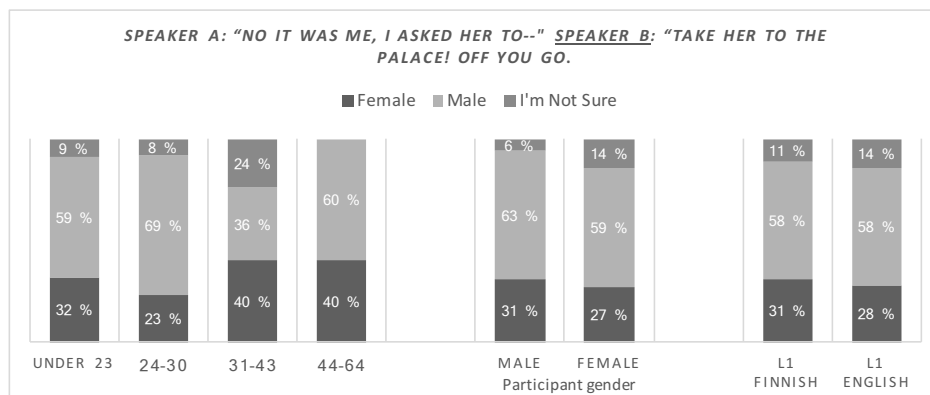


Figure 10: Directive + Interruption

The quote containing both a directive and an interruption (interruption indicated with --) was associated to a male speaker by the clear majority of all groups, except for the age group 31–43, where the slight majority said the speaker was a female. The comments showed that in addition to the interruption, the attitude of the speaker was perceived as controlling, which also made the participants assume that Speaker B was male.

(48) *Telling others what to do, speaker B clearly has more power in the situation, therefore male.*

(49) *The fact that speaker B both interrupts speaker A and gives them orders leads me to believe the speaker B is in either in a powerful position or or [sic] simply really offensive, so probably male.*

(50) *Because he's giving a command about controlling a woman.*

(51) *Men tend to interrupt more often and tend to be more assertive b [sic].*

As the above examples tell, using power over others and being strong-minded were again strongly linked with men.

4.3.8 Directive + Swearing

In Figure 11, Speaker A's commanding language and swearing was clearly associated with a male speaker, again by all other groups but the age group of 44–64, where 60% (N=5) said

the speaker was female. As with the two previous quotes containing directives, all groups answered “I’m not sure” visibly less often.

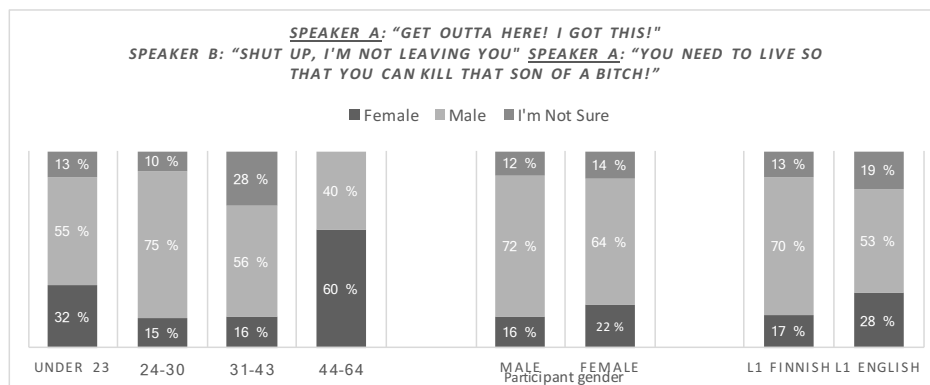


Figure 11: Directive + Swearing

The open answers revealed that swearing was indeed the biggest factor in the participants’ decision. However, as seen in example 56 below, the line that contained the swear word was also associated with a woman speaker.

- (52) *I think it's more common to hear males using the expression "son of a bitch".*
- (53) *Swearing and less formal language.*
- (54) *man [sic] more likely to use profane language.*
- (55) *Son of a bitch is mostly used by men.*
- (56) *You need to live so that you can kill that son of a bitch! -sounds like a woman said it.*

Furthermore, as with the previous quotes, aggressiveness and position of power were mentioned several times by the participants who said Speaker A was male.

- (57) *Talking about killing.*
- (58) *More aggressivity [sic].*
- (59) *[...] Traditionally males take action. [...] There are too few ones in which gender doesn't matter.*

4.3.9 Impoliteness

Impoliteness, which in the quote in Figure 12 is the exclamation “shut up” by Speaker B, was the only feature that overall was not visibly associated with a particular gender, the only exception being the age group of 44–64, where the quote was associated with a male by the

clear majority of respondents. In all the other groups, “male” and “female” answers were extremely close to each other.

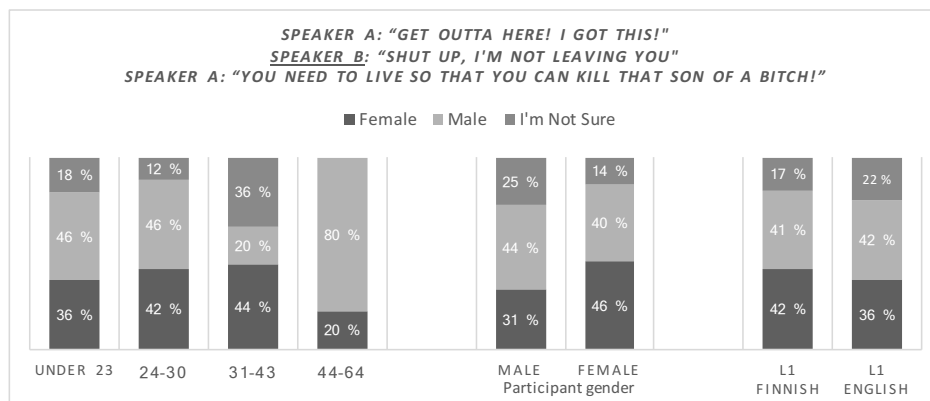


Figure 12: Impoliteness

In the open answers, participants who thought Speaker B was male argued that the whole conversation between Speakers A and B was very masculine. Examples 60 and 61 speak for the importance of general connotations that the situation evoked in the participants. Similarly, the participants who said Speaker B is female also relied on their perceptions of the conversations context, as examples 62 and 63 show.

(60) *Because it seems to be an extreme all-male situation.*

(61) *[...] seems like a dialogue between two tough guys in a dangerous situation. It would probably be written differently if there was a woman involved.*

(62) *[...] Roughly speaking, speaker A seems to showcase more of a rational way of thinking while speaker B seems to think more emotionally. Stereotypically, men are considered more rational than women and women more emotional than men.*

(63) *[...] One (A) is giving a command and assuming a dangerous task that might kill him. The other (B) is protesting but her opinion is being dismissed.*

As mentioned before, the quantitative results alone showed that gendered linguistic stereotypes were recognized and a closer look at the results revealed that there were differences, and moreover, similarities when the results were divided based on the demographic identifiers of the participants. The quantitative viewpoint needs to be enhanced with the qualitative results as the answers given by the participants to the open-ended question “why do you think that?” provided yet another new perspective on the overall results. Next, Chapter 5 gives a more in-depth look at the results and discusses both the quantitative and the qualitative perspectives of the results.

5. Discussion

In this chapter I discuss the results in more detail. I return to the main findings and the general trends of both the quantitative and qualitative results listed above in section 4.3. This part of the discussion is divided into four sections. The first three sections discuss the results considering the demographic identifiers of the participants; gender, age and native language, and the fourth section examines the possible effects semantic properties of the quotes had on the results. Next, I examine how the influence of the quotes' semantic qualities showed in the results. Then, I re-examine these results in comparison to the previous studies presented in the background chapter, especially to the ones of Lakoff (1975/2004) and Coates (1993), the theoretical basis of this thesis. Lastly, I look at which of the hypotheses of my study were met and review the study by discussing its weaknesses as well as discuss some possibilities for further research.

5.1 Analyzing the Results

As stated above, the overall results showed that the participants' answers were mostly in line with the linguistic stereotypes introduced in the background chapter. Furthermore, the identifier-based results showed that in some cases the participants even answered extremely evenly (as seen above in Figure 3 and Figure 9, for example). Despite having different demographic backgrounds, on average the participants' answers were very similar, which suggests that language-based stereotypes of the usage of English are widely known and recognized among different age groups, different gender identities and among native and non-native speakers of English.

This is an important finding, as for one, it suggests that these stereotypes persist through generations, and furthermore, these results indicate that linguistic gender stereotypes are rather universal: in principle, they suggest that whether you're a woman in your 20s speaking (American) English, or a Finnish-speaking middle-aged man, you potentially associate the word "cute" with women, for example. Still, it is worth keeping in mind that to every open-ended question, there were at least one or two answers that indicated the quotes were perceived not to contain any gendered language, which examples 28 and 29 demonstrated. However, most of the both quantitative and qualitative results supported the claims made above. The following sections discuss more closely how gender, age, native language and semantics influenced the results.

5.1.1 Gender

Surprisingly, the gender identity of the participants did not notably show in the answers, excluding a few minor exceptions. One exception was for example in the quote in Figure 9, consisting solely of directives, which was associated with a male speaker by 94% (N=32) of the male participants. Interestingly, none of the male participants answered “I’m not sure”. In comparison, 16% (N=63) of the female participants were not sure of the speaker’s gender. This suggests that men associate directives very strongly with their own gender identity.

Moreover, another interesting exception was that impoliteness (see Figure 12) was more associated to women by female participants and to men by male participants. One possibility for this could be self-reflection, meaning that the participants could imagine themselves saying “shut up, I’m not leaving you”, as the quote is, though impolite, something that one could say to someone you care about, and in this sense, a quote easy to picture yourself saying. Nevertheless, the small amount of significant differences in the quantitative results of the male and female participants add to the fact that these language stereotypes are widely recognized.

Furthermore, the qualitative results revealed that, interestingly, on multiple occasions the same quality of a quote was associated with both men and women by the participants. For example, in the quote in Figure 8, the intensive *so* (Examples 38 & 40) and in the quote in Figure 11, saying “son of a bitch” (Examples 52, 55 & 56) were qualities that some participants associated with women and others with men. This indicates that the participants’ personal experiences play an important role in the way they perceived the speaker. Some stereotypes and beliefs of the ways women and men speak are very individual.

5.1.2 Age

As stated earlier, generally all age groups except the oldest age group (44–64) answered extremely evenly, excluding three instances where the answers of other age groups deviated noticeably. In the first case, 24 to 30-year-olds showed noticeable uncertainty about the speaker of the quote in Figure 6, which contained the term of endearment “you poor thing”, while the other term of endearment, “sweetie”, was strongly associated with women by the same group. This suggests that the age group perceived “you poor thing” as a less gendered term. This could also be a possible sign that certain terms of endearment are perceived as gender stereotypes. This idea was supported in the participants’ comments, as “sweetie” was

repeatedly said to be a word that can be used by either gender but is directed to a child (see Examples 21–23), and furthermore, one comment stated that “you poor thing” is not something that man would say to a man and that the term is “motherly” (see Example 25). Nonetheless, this is a finding that would have to be studied more carefully.

In the other two instances, the participants aged 31–43 were noticeably unsure about the gender of the speakers in both the quote in Figure 10, which had a directive with an interruption, and in Figure 12, which had impolite language. This could indicate that the group did not perceive the features mentioned above as such strong stereotypes of men’s language but more as general non-gendered use of language.

In five instances, the oldest age group (44–64) perceived the gender of a quote’s speaker differently than the other groups. However, surprisingly, these answers did not always correlate with the linguistic stereotypes. Using the word “sweetie” and the intensive *so* were associated more with men by the older age group, and similarly, using a directive and the word “son of a bitch” were associated with women, against the stereotypes. The euphemism “fricking”, on the other hand, was associated with a female speaker by the age group unlike the other participants, who associated it with men. Likewise, the group associated using impolite language strongly with men, when most of the other identifier-based groups associated it with women or were not sure.

I expected that the older participants would stick with the stereotypes the most, but the fact that “sweetie”, for example, was associated with men shows that the older generations might have different assumptions of these features, which associating “son of a bitch” more with women also suggests. However, as there were only five participants in this age group, these are rather ambiguous presumptions. It is likely that the group’s personal experiences impacted the results, so this is an aspect that would need to be researched more to see whether there truly is a divide this noticeable. Still, what this finding does possibly indicate is that older age does not mean that these traditional stereotypes are recognized more, but differently.

Another finding concerning age was that the answers of participants aged under 23 years and the L1 English speakers were on multiple occasions very similar. In this study, the results were not analyzed based on each individual participant. However, to see whether there was an actual similarity between the groups it was necessary to look at the native language of the participants in the youngest group. This revealed that the majority of the participants aged

under 23 years were in fact native (American) English speakers. For this reason, the similarity in the answers of the two identifier groups mentioned above does not tell of an actual connection in language beliefs between of young people and L1 English speakers, and hence, it was not a meaningful finding after all.

Overall, the results showed that the age of the participants was not a major deciding factor, which, again, speaks for the notable unison in the participants' answers. Nonetheless, it is worth recognizing that some deviation in the answers between different age groups did occur.

5.1.3 Native Language

As came apparent above, the answers of L1 English speakers and L1 Finnish speakers did not significantly differ from one another: the answers of non-native speakers of English were in line with the gendered linguistic stereotypes. I argue that it is not very likely that the Finnish speaking participants would have learned these linguistic stereotypes from studying the English language at school, hence it could be assumed that the gender stereotypes of the English language may be in fact learned via the mediums such as film. This key finding implies that not only do non-native speakers recognize the gender stereotypes of the English language, but it might also suggest that non-native speakers learn these stereotypes via mass culture mediums, for example via blockbuster films.

Furthermore, it turned out that in general, L1 (American) English speakers answered "I'm not sure" more than L1 Finnish speakers. This could indicate that Finnish speakers have stronger beliefs of gender stereotypes in the context of Hollywood films, or it might suggest that L1 English speakers find it harder to state facts of the language they both speak themselves and hear in entertainment mediums, such as films. Hence, the native speakers might have a harder time separating the stereotypes they might experience in everyday life with the ones they expect to find in Hollywood films.

5.1.4 Semantics

As mentioned before, the answers to the open-ended question "why do you think that?" revealed that the quotes' semantic content influenced the participants' beliefs of the speaker's gender noticeably. Most importantly, in some cases, the answers brought up gender stereotypes of language that had nothing to do with their grammatical properties nor with the vocabulary of the quotes. The answers indicated that the tone and simply *the feeling* that the

quote gave the participants influenced which gender they associated the quote with. Moreover, the pragmatic qualities of the quotes, i.e. the context-related connotations the quotes evoked in the participants, influenced their answers.

I first noticed this phenomenon when I analyzed the answers of the quotes that contained tag questions. The quote “they’ll have to get dinner somewhere else, won’t they?” in Figure 2 was not particularly associated with either gender. However, the participants’ comments revealed that when it was associated with men, it was because it was seen as rude and harsh (see Examples 4–6). Moreover, the other quote that included a tag question was generally more associated with men. The comments showed that this was not because of the tag question, but because the quote discussed war, which was considered a topic of conversation stereotypical for men (see Examples 7–10). Likewise, the quote which had the euphemism “fricking” was not only associated with men because of the stereotype that men swear more (see Examples 33 & 34) but also because it was considered aggressive, and as the quote’s supposed tone implied to the participants that the speaker lacked patience (see Examples 30–32).

Furthermore, while the quote containing an intensive *so* (reported in Figure 8) was generally associated with women, the comments showed that this was partially because the quote’s speaker talked about a man. The participants stated that when someone talks about a man, the assumption is that the speaker is a woman, and, moreover, a woman talking to another woman about a man (see Examples 41 & 42). A similar instance occurred with the quote “shut up, I’m not leaving you” (reported in Figure 12). The open answers showed that the participants made their decision based on the connotations they had of the possible context, for example some assumed that the situation was happening between two men (see Examples 60–63).

This finding could indicate that the linguistic features considered as stereotypical of women and men for decades now do not in fact shape or influence the language beliefs that people have as much as it has been assumed. This would mean that language perceptions derive more from the semantic content of what is being said as well as from the situational context. Moreover, it’s important to recognize that even though the participants did not at all times recognize the linguistic stereotypes, the contemporary Hollywood blockbusters still contain gendered linguistic features, as has come apparent in this paper. For example, two out of the four quotes that had a war-related topic were in fact quotes of female characters, for instance the quote reported in Figure 3. This indicates that the films in fact do not rely on the semantic

stereotypes as much as the participants thought they would. This raises an intriguing juxtaposition: contemporary blockbusters are relying on old linguistic gender stereotypes while their audience does not recognize these features as gender stereotypes, but they recognize other stereotypes based on the semantic and pragmatic content of the language, which are equally used by both female and male characters in Hollywood.

As mentioned before, in the framework of this study it was not possible to do a closer analysis of the scenes where the gendered linguistic features were used, but my observation was that very often when a male character used women's language and vice versa, the characters showed qualities traditionally associated with the other gender. For example, in *Wonder Woman*, when the extremely masculine leading man Steve was needed to be seen as a more vulnerable and caring character, he used the term of endearment "you poor thing". This observation is based on anecdotal evidence and would require a lot more research in order to make proper claims, but nevertheless, I found this to be a very thought-provoking collateral finding of this study.

5.2 The Results in the Light of the Theoretical Background

The results were mostly in line with Lakoff's observations (1975/2004) presented in the background chapter. In my study, out of the women's language stereotypes Lakoff named in *Language and a Woman's Place*, terms of endearment, the intensive *so* and empty adjectives were associated with women, and out of the stereotypes of men's language, interruption, commands and swearing were distinctly associated with men. Euphemism and tag questions (except when together with an empty adjective), however, were both more associated with men, which is contrary to Lakoff's claims. Moreover, impoliteness, which Lakoff considered as typical of men, was generally not more associated with either gender.

The tag question was indeed a complex feature as several of the previous studies presented in the background chapter had suggested. This was also supported by the fact that the quotes with tag questions evoked a lot of uncertainty in the participants (see Figure 2, for example). As stated previously, overall the tag questions were more associated with men, but when the results were divided based on the demographic identifiers, only the quote in Figure 3 was associated with men. And, as became apparent, this was due to the semantics of the quote. Furthermore, the euphemism was on a few occasions recognized as something that a woman would say to be more polite (see Examples 35–37). However, it was still largely seen as

stereotypical of men due to the quote's aggressive nature. Moreover, while impoliteness in the quantitative results was not associated to men (vis Lakoff), on many occasions the qualitative results showed that being rude, assertive and violent was considered a stereotype of men, all features that can be considered as impolite. Hence, in this sense Lakoff's claim was in line with my results.

Furthermore, Lakoff (1975/2004) claimed that "men's language is increasingly being used by women, but women's language is not being adopted by men" (p. 44). However, in my study, most stereotypes of men's language –swearing, interruption and especially using directives– were more recognized than many stereotypes of women's language. This implies that there are stronger beliefs of how men stereotypically speak, and moreover, that using language that is aggressive, commanding and even rude is considered particularly stereotypical of men. The fact that there was more uncertainty of the speakers' gender in quotes containing women's language stereotypes might indicate that those features are perceived as more general, or furthermore, this could imply that men using language stereotypical to women is not seen as unlikely as women using language stereotypical to men. Moreover, the qualitative results countered this, as the same qualities and features were associated with both men and women. Furthermore, for every quote there was a comment which stated that the quote was not perceived as being gendered.

The qualitative results were also in line with the Potter's (2001) idea that "the media can shape our opinions, beliefs, and values" (p. 262) as the answers to the open-ended questions showed that the participants had pre-existing ideas of how men and women are represented in Hollywood films. Moreover, one finding was that the gender stereotypes of English were recognized by non-native speakers. In light of Potter's observations on how people can learn stereotypes through exposure and enforcement from different media, my study's results suggest that this indeed has happened via Hollywood blockbusters among Finnish speakers.

5.3 Revisiting the Hypotheses

My primary aim for this study was to see if linguistic stereotypes are recognized and whether at least some linguistic features could be named by the participants. This hypothesis was indeed met. I also expected that swearing would be the most associated feature with men and terms of endearment the feature associated most with women. The latter presumption of this hypothesis was met as terms of endearment were the feature most associated with

women, but the former presumption was not, as directives were the feature most associated with men--although swearing was a feature also associated with men very strongly. The hypothesis that the older age group (44–64) would stick to the stereotypes more than the younger participants was not met, as in many instances the older age group's answers were against the stereotypes. Most of the time, this oldest age group's answers differed from those of the younger participants, who answered mostly in unison in correlation with the stereotypes. And likewise, as stated above, gender identity did not have a notable influence on the results, hence the hypothesis that gender of the respondents would matter was not met. Lastly, the hypothesis that the gender stereotypes would be recognized by L1 Finnish speakers was met, since the L1 of the participants did not notably influence the results.

5.4 The Weaknesses of the Study and Further Research Possibilities

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the age division of the participants is one of the study's weaknesses. Most participants were aged 24–30 (48%), which means that the results are somewhat biased towards the perceptions of young adults, thus the results do not represent the perceptions of people from a wide age spectrum. The same can be said of the gender distribution of the participants in general, as 63% (N=100) identified as female. Even though gender identity did not have that big of an impact on the results, it is possible that there is some bias towards women in the results.

Likewise, the fact that only three participants who identified as gender non-binary answered the questionnaire made it impossible to investigate how gender non-binary people evaluated the quotes, which I also consider a weakness of this study. If I were to conduct the questionnaire again, I would pay more attention to its distribution and try to make sure it would reach people from a more diverse demographic background.

Furthermore, the questionnaire's introduction (see Appendix C) might set the participants up for stereotypes, which may have influenced the way they evaluated the quotes, thus impacting their answers. However, I feel that this sort of study is nearly impossible to make without somehow indicating that gendered language is being researched. Once the participants realize that they must choose which gender they associate a quote with, it immediately indicates that there either is or is not something in the quote that gives away the gender of the speaker, which then makes the participants read the quote with a certain mindset.

Moreover, as Chapter 3 already mentioned, the problem of having to place the copyrights of the film quotes in the questionnaire itself (see Appendix E) was indeed another inevitable weakness of this study. Likewise, the introduction says that the quotes are from recent Hollywood films (see Appendix C), which was one factor that might have influenced the participants' perceptions of the quotes. For one, it made the participants look at the quotes from the perspective of modern language, and, secondly, it possibly caused the participants to think of a character rather than a real person when they read the quotes. However, due to the copyright issue, the sources of the quotes had to be stated. Still, in retrospect, I would aim to find a way to modify the phrasing of the questionnaire's introduction. Nevertheless, I trust that these results give one perspective to the beliefs that people have of how women and men are expected to use language in reality.

This study is merely a glimpse into the field of film, gender and sociolinguistics. Most importantly, as discussed in the previous sections, the results of this study suggest that further research in the field of language and gender should change their focus from the decades-old gendered linguistic features to the other gender-based stereotypes that language contains, those that arise from the semantics and situational context of language. It would be essential to study what kind of stereotypes of this type exist and how they shape the perceptions we have of gender and its relation to language. If I were to continue this research further, I would start with close thematic analysis of the film dialogues to demonstrate how gendered language is used to emphasize various qualities of a character and direct the audience to perceive the character in a certain light.

Moreover, this method could be applied to non-blockbusters, i.e. independent films, to see whether similar linguistic features could be found there, and, furthermore, the dialogue of characters from the LGBTQT community could be examined. Also, it would be very interesting to do an identical study on films that are solely written by women or non-binary genders and compare the results to those of this paper. There are also other linguistic aspects that could be looked at when studying the language used in contemporary Hollywood blockbusters. One could screen the film dialogues for the ways in which women and men are referred to, continuing with Lakoff (1975/2004), in which the stereotypical differences of the terminology that is used of women and men in the English language is highlighted.

6. Conclusion

The primary aim of this study was to see whether language gender stereotypes, first introduced by Lakoff in the 1970s, are still recognized, and furthermore, to see what kind of perceptions quotes from contemporary Hollywood blockbusters containing these gendered linguistic features could evoke. The study also aimed to see whether non-native speakers of English, in this case L1 Finnish speakers, would recognize these stereotypes similarly to L1 (American) English speakers, and moreover, if there was a possibility that language stereotypes could be learned and enforced via global mass culture, for example via Hollywood blockbusters.

These goals were achieved by conducting a questionnaire in which the participants were asked to evaluate ten film quotes taken out of context and to answer which gender they associate with the quotes. The participants also had the opportunity to comment on their choice by answering to the optional open-ended question “why do you think that?”. Thus, the questionnaire enabled the gathering of both quantitative and qualitative data. If this study had been only quantitative, the results would have implied that the gendered linguistic features were strongly associated to a particular gender. But when examined in the light of the qualitative results, a different perspective to linguistic stereotyping emerged.

The results showed that the stereotypes were recognized as well as provided interesting information on language beliefs: semantics and pragmatics had a notable influence on how the quotes were perceived. Moreover, the results also indicated that L1 Finnish speakers recognized the stereotypes similarly to the native (American) English speakers. These results implied that the old stereotypes based on the linguistic qualities of language are dated, and that future research would benefit from focusing more on the semantic and pragmatic gender stereotypes, which could be systematically spread by and enforced in mass culture, via such mediums as blockbusters films.

Moreover, whether the participants thought that the stereotypes apply to real life or not, the results suggested that the stereotypes nevertheless exist as beliefs and expectations in people’s minds. The study showed that stereotypes exist in the world of Hollywood blockbusters, films that reach millions, possibly even billions of people globally during and after their movie theater cycle.

In *Jurassic World: The Fallen Kingdom*, the leading man, Owen, swears continuously and uses a variety of vulgar expressions, which is not addressed in the film in anyway, but when the leading woman, Claire, is about to say the s-word, a volcano conveniently erupts and leaves Claire miming the word with her mouth. Though the scene might come off as some sort of comic relief in an intense situation, it has problematic undertones. It seems rather incredible that the film goes to such extreme lengths in silencing Claire, as hearing her swear even in a life-threatening situation would somehow shatter the character's otherwise "polite" image. Simultaneously, instances like this enforce the stereotype of it being characteristic of men to swear, but not women. It is important to keep in mind that if the stereotypes studied in this paper were just age-old remains of times more unequal, then why would the Claires and Owens of the blockbuster-world be keeping them alive, and why would those stereotypes be repeated if they would not suggest to the audience how they should perceive the characters.

The dialogue we hear in a film has gone through a long journey from the moment it is first scripted, so the final product is more or less always mimicking something from the real world (Kozloff, 2000). In other words, film dialogues aim to represent reality. Thus, it can be said that the dialogue that contains the decade-old gendered linguistic features, or the semantic and pragmatic language gender stereotypes, are always mimics of the language that women and men are expected to use in the everyday life.

Considering the progress achieved towards the awareness of the film industry's inequality, I believe it is the high time to re-evaluate the significance of the cause and effect that the deep-rooted language conventions of Hollywood have on the average moviegoer. This study provided a glimpse of the effects of linguistic stereotyping in the contemporary Hollywood blockbuster and offered a basis for alternative approaches for further research in the field of language and gender, where the focus should shift from the features traditionally considered as gender language stereotypes to those stereotypes that arise from the semantic and pragmatic qualities of language.

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Appendices

Appendix A: *Top-10 of the highest grossing American films worldwide in 2018*

Rank	Film	Worldwide Box Office
1	Avengers: Infinity War	\$2,048,134,200
2	Black Panther	\$1,348,258,224
3	Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom	\$1,305,772,799
4	Incredibles 2	\$1,242,507,764
5	Aquaman	\$1,146,894,640
6	Bohemian Rhapsody	\$903,530,556
7	Venom	\$853,628,605
8	Mission: Impossible - Fallout	\$787,456,522
9	Deadpool 2	\$786,680,557
10	Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald	\$652,220,086


Source: *Www.the-numbers.com*, <https://www.the-numbers.com/box-office-records/worldwide/all-movies/cumulative/released-in-2018>

Appendix B: *Top-10 of the highest grossing American films worldwide in 2017*

Rank	Film	Worldwide Box Office
1	Star Wars Ep. VIII: The Last Jedi	\$1,316,721,747
2	Beauty and the Beast	\$1,259,199,706
3	The Fate of the Furious	\$1,234,846,267
4	Despicable Me 3	\$1,034,724,710
5	Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle	\$964,496,193
6	Spider-Man: Homecoming	\$880,166,350
7	Guardians of the Galaxy Vol 2	\$869,113,101
8	Thor: Ragnarok	\$853,958,289
9	Wonder Woman	\$821,133,378
10	Coco	\$807,126,015

Source: *Www.the-numbers.com*, <https://www.the-numbers.com/box-office-records/worldwide/all-movies/cumulative/released-in-2017>

Appendix C: *Introduction to the questionnaire*



HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO
HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

Contemporary Hollywood Blockbuster and Linguistics Questionnaire

Welcome to the questionnaire! Answering will take around 10 minutes.

To participate in the questionnaire you must either

- speak Finnish as your native language and have knowledge of English
- or
- speak American English as your native language

Directions:

Part 1: Demographic questions

- A few basic questions for background information

Part 2: Film quotes

- You will see quotes from recent Hollywood films
- Please select if you think the quote you see is spoken by a male or a female speaker (choose one)
- You can also explain which part(s) of a quote made you think that (optional)
- There are 10 quotes and they are presented one at a time
- The individual lines are marked as "speaker A" and "speaker B" if the quote contains two speakers

I'm a student at the University of Helsinki and this questionnaire is for my Master's Thesis, thank you for your time and for your help in my research. All answers are anonymous and will be used for research purposes only.

By completing the survey and submitting it, you agree to allow the researcher to use your responses for her MA Thesis research.

Privacy policy / notice for scientific research found [here](#).

Appendix D: *The questionnaire's demographic questions*

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS
<p>I identify as...</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Female</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Male</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Non-binary</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I'd rather not say</p> <p>Age</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Under 18</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 18-23</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 24-30</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 31-36</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 37-43</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 44-54</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 55-64</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 65+</p> <p>Native language</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Finnish</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> English</p>

Appendix E: *Example question from the questionnaire with two speakers*

10.
<p>Speaker A: "Get outta here! I got this!" Speaker B: "Shut up, I'm not leaving you" Speaker A: "You need to live so that you can kill that son of a bitch!"</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Speaker A is female</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Speaker A is male</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I'm not sure</p> <p>Why do you think that? (optional)</p> <div><div></div></div> <p>Speaker A: "Get outta here! I got this!" Speaker B: "Shut up, I'm not leaving you" Speaker A: "You need to live so that you can kill that son of a bitch!"</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Speaker B is female</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Speaker B is male</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I'm not sure</p> <p>Why do you think that? (optional)</p> <div><div></div></div>

Appendix F: *The copyrights of the questionnaire*

Why do you think that? (optional)

<< Previous

Next >>

Copyrights of the quotes:

1. Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom ©Universal Pictures (2018)
2. & 6. Beauty and the Beast ©Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures (2017)
3. & 8. Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle ©Sony (2017)
4. & 10. Aquaman ©Warner Bros (2018)
5. & 7. Wonder Woman ©Warner Bros (2017)
9. Avengers: Infinity War ©Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures (2018)